NEA Today

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NEA Members Insurance Trust Summary Annual Report Enclosed
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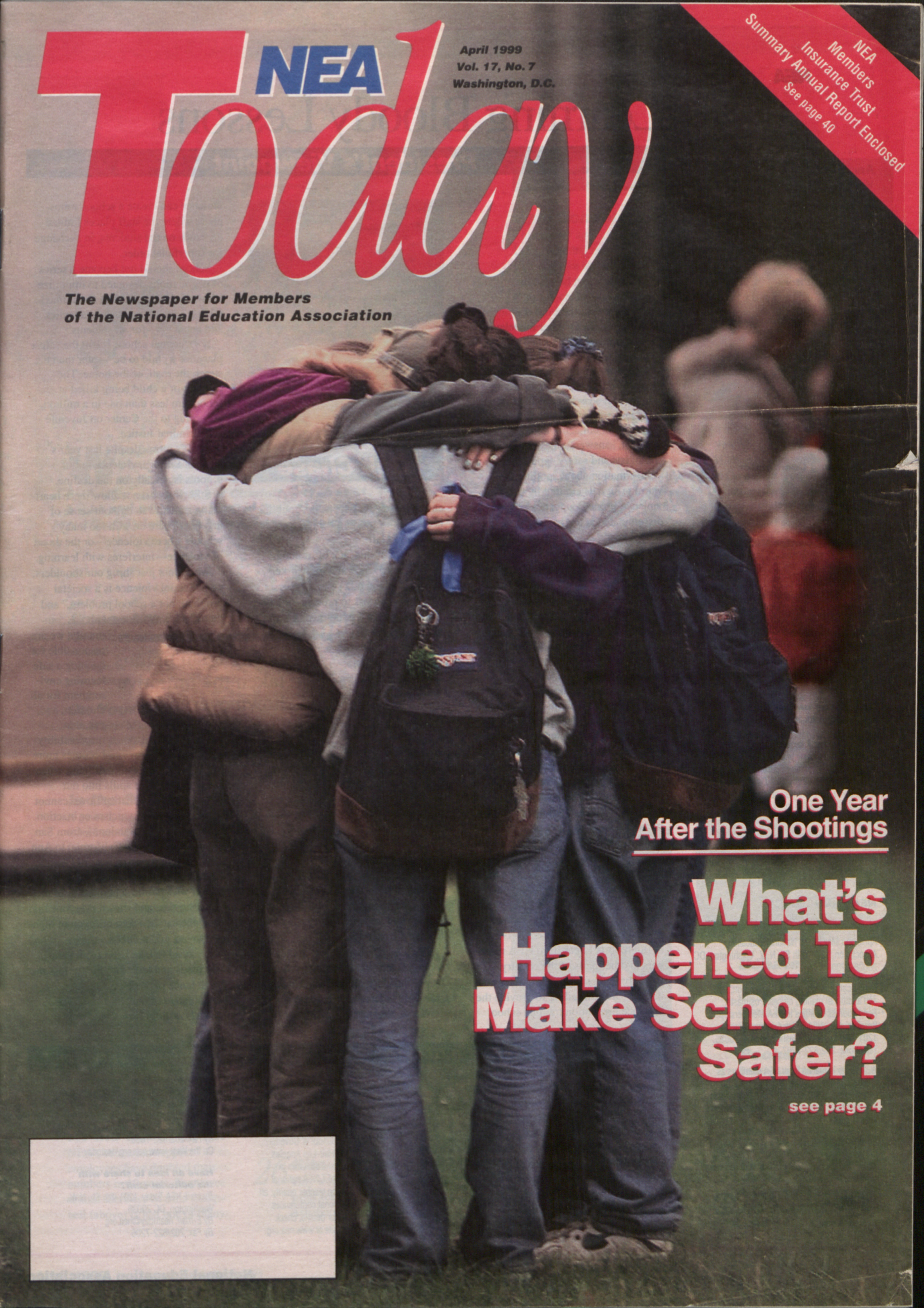
The Newspaper for Members of the National Education Association



One Year After the Shootings

What's Happened To Make Schools Safer?

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NEA Today

April 1999
Volume 17, Number 7

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Learning Bloody Lessons

President's Viewpoint

The shootings taught us it could happen anywhere. But not everyone heard the wake-up call.

Bob Chase

Paducah. Jonesboro. Edinboro. Springfield. After the television cameras were turned off last year and the reporters' notebooks tucked away, many educators in communities across America did some serious soul searching: What can we do to prevent such violence from occurring in our schools?

"A lot," answered the school psychologists and safety experts.

Information about spotting the warning signals emitted by troubled, violence-prone youngsters was widely disseminated at the beginning of this school year.

More school systems reached out to their communities, including law enforcement and social service agencies, to forge safe schools coalitions.

And more schools developed emergency plans for responding to potentially violent situations. Overall, the education community has become more vigilant.

"There's no question that those terrible shooting incidents, splashed all over the media, served as a wake-up call," says Jerry Painter, the Washington Education Association's general counsel and recognized authority on school violence prevention. "Our requests for training rocketed."

Luckily, WEA and the state department of education were prepared. In partnership, they had already created some of the best training programs in the nation to help school employees develop the skills for dealing with violence. They offer the training three times a year in different regions of the state, and business has been brisk.

But reports I hear from NEA members in other parts of the country strongly suggest that many states and districts are still failing to provide the violence prevention training school employees need. Especially troubling is the lack of training being provided to support staff.

Because of this lack of training, many bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, and other support personnel feel powerless to prevent violence. And they feel overwhelmed in some districts by the students' lack of respect and defiance of school rules.

To ignore 40 percent of the public school workforce when taking on a problem as serious as safety is absurd. Support personnel must be given the tools to do their job.

Imagine, for a moment, what it must be like to be a bus driver. Every day you drive 40 to 50 students to and from school, and most of the time your back is to them. Now don't try to tell me that driver doesn't need training in behavior management, plus the full support of the district, when it comes to enforcing the rules.

The violence that erupts in the classroom often originates on the school bus or the playground, in the hallway, stairwell, cafeteria, or bathroom.

Worse yet, the constant threat of violence can create a school atmosphere where the staff places limited demands on the students, in exchange for superficial order.

School should not become a series of negotiations designed to minimize hassle. School should be about maximizing expectations—in academics and behavior—for all students.

It's true that school is still the safest place for a child to be—safer than the street, the mall, or the home. The chances of a child being killed at school are less than one in a million, according to the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice.

What's more, despite last year's spate of killings, violence in our schools is actually on the decline.

Still, we must not allow these heartening statistics to dull our sense of urgency. There are still too many schools where violence—or the threat of violence—interferes with learning.

We cannot just shrug our shoulders, say, "School violence is a societal problem, not a school problem," and then lay low. Working with the community, we are responsible for creating a safe learning environment for all children, and, yes, that responsibility becomes more difficult when society's violence spills into our schools. But, no, that spillover cannot be an excuse for cynicism or inaction.

> **P**ioneering local unions have taken the initiative and shown everyone that violence can be taken on and reduced.

Pioneering local unions—from San Bernardino County, California, to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to Broward County, Florida—have taken the initiative, joined with public school allies in their communities, and shown everyone that violence can be taken on, even in high-risk areas, and reduced.

We need to take heart from their successes and look to them for lessons in violence prevention.

Comments? You can E-mail me directly at BobChase@nea.org.

NEA at a Glance

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Did You Know...
That NEA President Bob Chase has delivered key speeches in the past year to the National Press Club, Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, Town Hall-Los Angeles, the Commonwealth Club in Detroit, the AFT/NEA national conference on teacher quality, all six NEA regional conferences, and more. For details, check NEA's Web site at www.nea.org.

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NEA Today April '99

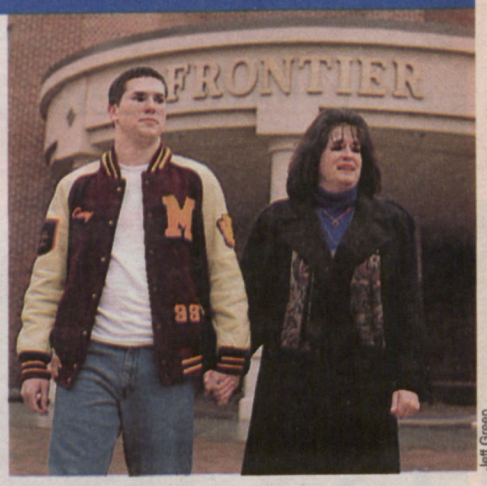
All Your Favorites

Who better to select the top 100 children's books of all time than NEA members? A recent survey of more than 1,000 educators produced a "cat-a-list" of favorites that put *Charlotte's Web* at #1. The books pictured here are all in the top dozen. To check out the whole list, go to www.nea.org/readacross.

Cover Story

4 Safe Schools

Three years ago, in Moses Lake, Washington, a 14-year-old shot and killed a teacher and two students. Peggy McNutt—a second grade teacher, mother of a student held hostage, and NEA local affiliate president—remembers every detail. In an interview, she explains how her family and her school community put things back together. Also, a look at what school employees in districts across the country have done to make their schools safer. Some schools—like Frontier Middle School in Moses Lake—have faced tragedy. Other districts—like those in Buffalo, New York, and Ann Arbor, Michigan—are working to prevent it. On page 6, you'll find a list of resources that can help you make your school a safer place to work and learn.



Jeff Green

Cover photo: Springfield, Oregon, students in shock. Ben Margot/AP Wide World

Newsmakers

7 Across the Nation

More than 1 million NEA members and 20 million children turn the pages of NEA's second annual Read Across America.

8 On Your Side

Get in line: Michael Jordan's making points in retirement by giving away money to teachers and paras in public schools.

9 In the States

If passed, a New Hampshire bill would erode due process rights for state teachers.

10 At the Bargaining Table

In Chicago, part-time professors organize with NEA to boost salaries and working conditions.

11 At the Local Level

NEA's education support employees have doubled their numbers in 10 years. Tennessee school secretary Martha Campbell (above) is just one of many.

Learning

16 Innovators

Dr. Craig Ramey (below) says disadvantaged kids can catch up to their peers if they start school earlier. A real head start, he says, begins at age 2.

21 Inside Scoop

Views on the homework controversy: too much, not enough, or not at all? A quick look at the relevant research.

22 Families & Communities

In Montgomery, Alabama, NEA members teach parents—who may have had a bad experience in school—how to help their kids have a good one.

25 Rights Watch

Go to work at some charter schools—and say goodbye to employee rights at the door.

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Tiny word processors, huge gains for third graders in Asheboro, North Carolina.

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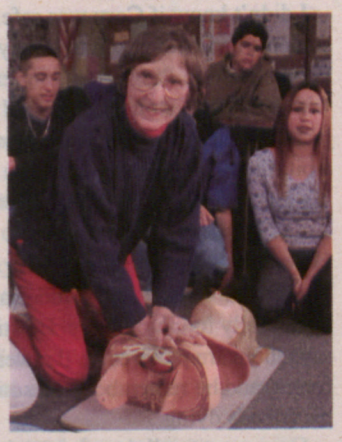
35 In the Light Lane

How does a bean seed know to grow up to be a bean plant? What's "pet the ham" mean? And who are the four fathers? Get your laughs here.

36 People

Los Angeles health teacher Eleanor Bralver (below) must have the secret to looking young. Believe it or not, she's 86—and planning to teach for 10 more years.



38 Money

Investment mania begins with a quiz to help you get your spending under control, then offers advice on how to buy stocks the smart way, create a balanced portfolio for retirement, and find a trustworthy financial planner. And one more thing: a definition of DRIP that pays dividends.

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An Arizona teacher takes a local censorship fight personally. After all, he wrote the book in question.

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Retired but not forgotten, Walter Cronkite's still America's most respected journalist. So what's he got to say about education?

Michal O'Neill/Outline

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Should teachers and support staff be able to suspend students? NEA members in California and Washington debate.

45 Books

Beauty and brains—that's the combination you'll find in the coffee table book, *School*.

46 Letters

Loads of letters about fighting tests, wrestling animals, and attacking games. Plus, life lessons from a teacher working in the Bolivian rain forest.

Safe Schools

In the year since the highly publicized shootings at schools in Arkansas, Oregon, and Pennsylvania, NEA members nationwide have been working to create schools where all students feel safe.

On April 24, students and staff in Pennsylvania schools will observe a moment of silence in memory of John Gillette, the Edinboro teacher gunned down by a student at a school dance on that day one year ago.

Gillette's death was just one in a spate of school shootings last spring that left the country reeling.

In March, four girls and a teacher were shot to death by two boys at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas. And, last May a 15-year-old opened fire on his peers in the cafeteria at Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon, killing two and wounding 22.

Schools, overall, continue to be among the safest places for kids, but sudden acts of violence can leave teachers, parents, and communities anxious, vulnerable, and unsure about how to keep their children safe.

This is the story of how one school community, stunned by violence three years ago, has regained safety and security.

IN MOSES LAKE, WASHINGTON

A Family Heals

Peggy McNutt was profoundly affected by the tragic murder of two students and a teacher at Frontier Middle School in Moses Lake, Washington, three years ago.

Her son Cory, now an 18-year-old high school senior, witnessed the deaths first-hand when he and other students were held hostage.

At the time of the shooting, McNutt was president of the Moses Lake Education Association and a second grade teacher at Discover Elementary School.

McNutt spoke recently to *NEA Today*'s Karen Gutloff about how the shooting affected her as a parent, teacher, and Association president.

What was your reaction when you heard about the shooting?

I remember vividly. It was 2:30, and we were just finishing an assembly. The PE coordinator at Cory's school called and said, "Cory needs you. He's okay, but you need to come down to the school right away." I quickly got someone to cover my class, and I left.

It was cold and snowing, and when I got there, some kids were outside without coats on. There were ambulances and police cars everywhere.

I ran into a local minister who said, "There's been a shooting!" He told me a teacher was dead, and a couple of students were, too. He didn't know any names at that point.

I didn't know if Cory was safe. The students had been taken to the gym. People were milling around in tears, with blank looks on their faces. I was just focused on finding Cory. I walked a bit, finally saw him. I just gave him a big hug. We were both pretty dazed.

How was Cory affected?

The two months after the shooting were really rough on Cory. He still says there are pictures he'll never forget, and he remembers the sounds of his friends dying.

Cory went to all the memorial services and the counseling sessions. But after the shooting, he would go to school, come home, and sleep. He'd wake up at 6 or 7 in the evening and would be awake all night.

He also had terrible survivor's guilt. He felt guilty about his classmates dying and often wondered if he could have saved everyone. He felt especially guilty about the girl Natalie who was injured. Just minutes before the shooting, she asked if he would switch seats with her so she could sharpen her pencils. So he would have been sitting in her seat when the shooting started.

Jeff Green

Teacher Peggy McNutt and her son Cory (at right, in front of Frontier Middle School) deal with the aftermath of violence.

I thank God every day that I still have him. I realize how close I came to losing him.

What has been the hardest part of the healing process?

It's a never-ending process. Cory had to be tested for hepatitis B, then he had to testify in the criminal trial. Even now there are civil suits pending and he has to do depositions and testify again.

What helped students and teachers most after the shooting?

Kids said they really appreciated getting letters and cards from students at other schools. We got letters from teachers and their students, from state Associations and the NEA.

People sent money we used to buy pizza for the kids. We were able to buy a laptop for the girl injured in the shooting, so she could work from home.

The Washington Education Association helped us find guardian angel pins for the students, which they really loved. Kids still wear t-shirts that say "In Remembrance." It gives them a way to remember their friends.

How vulnerable did you feel as an educator going back into your own classroom?

Every school set up a crisis plan after the shooting. If there was a problem, you'd hear a short blast of an air horn on the loudspeaker, and you had to

Allen Spearman/The Commercial Appeal/AP Wide World

After last year's shooting in Jonesboro, Arkansas, a police officer helps a mother and her son to safety.

lock your doors and take cover. Our school even bought a cell phone to help with communication.

We take all threats very seriously now. Last year, one of my second graders made a threat about going home and getting a gun. That student was removed from school for a week and received counseling.

In my class, we talk a lot about the things we need to do to be safe and the proper way to treat each other.

How did you handle your duties as Association president during this crisis?

It was tough, but you do what you have to do. I called the Association's executive board together, and we brainstormed ways to make things better for teachers at Frontier Middle. We bought books on surviving loss and put them in the lounge, and we brought food.

We arranged for subs so that teachers from elementary schools, who were familiar to the students, could come to Frontier and talk to the kids.

What needs to happen to prevent violence in schools?

I think Cory said it best after the shooting. He said, "Mom, it's a society problem, not just a problem with kids."

We keep asking for volunteers in the school, but parents are all busy.

We have so many students in these schools and so few adults. What parent takes care of 25 kids? As long as that's true, kids will get lost in the shuffle.

... A School Rebuilds

In February 1996, a troubled 14-year-old at Frontier Middle School in Moses Lake, Washington, terrorized classmates by brandishing a gun in math class, then killing teacher Leona Cairnes and two 14-year-old classmates. Most of the students who witnessed the shooting have gone on to high school, and the shooting is no longer a topic of daily conversation. But security changes made since then have left visual reminders of the event—and have helped restore a sense of safety and security.

■ Redesigned Space

After the Moses Lake shooting, security quickly became the guiding issue for a school renovation project already underway.

Hallways were widened to eliminate any nooks and crannies where students could hide or loiter.

Like mall bathrooms, rest rooms were designed without doors. Parts of the bathroom are now visible from the outside. For example, the central sink is near the outside of the rest room, so staff can see what's going on inside.

Jeff Green

■ Surveillance Cameras

Video cameras have been placed in the hallways at Frontier. The cameras are set up to show what's going on in different parts of the school, especially the cafeteria where there are a lot of students and not as many teachers.

■ IDs and Access

School staff now wear badges, so those not wearing them will be easier to identify as strangers. And only one main entrance is open during the day.

"All doors are locked during the day except one main entrance right by the office," says Don Lindgren, a physical education teacher at Frontier. "Visitors must walk by the school secretary to get in, and they have to wear a visitor's pass." Lindgren says staff are now quick to question anyone without a pass.

■ Security guards

Two security guards walk the halls, monitoring traffic and making sure kids don't loiter. They use walkie-talkies to alert each other to trouble spots.

Lindgren says the security officers quickly become aware who the troubled students are and often build relationships with those students. By fostering relationships with the kids, the guards are often alerted to trouble before it happens.

■ Lockdown Drill

Twice a year, a siren prompts teachers and students to lock doors and windows, retreat to a designated room, and stay put until they get the all-clear sign.

■ Reconfigured Middle School

The year after the shooting, ninth graders were moved out of Frontier Middle School and placed in the high school. The seventh and eighth graders at the middle school level will soon be joined by sixth graders.

Mike Himes, president of the Moses Lake Education Association, says changing the middle school structure has been one of the single best security improvements in the district.

"Ninth graders were more likely to drink and date. The seventh and eighth graders would try to do the things the ninth graders were doing. By moving the ninth graders to the high school, we eliminated some of that peer pressure."

—Karen Gutloff

One Year Later

Facing Tragedy...

School communities in Pennsylvania, Oregon, and Arkansas came face to face with violence last spring. One year later, parents, educators, and neighbors are still struggling to find ways of restoring safety in the schools.

Edinboro, Pennsylvania
In the past year, school administrators, teachers, parents, clergy, university, and Pennsylvania State Education Association representatives have formed a community coalition.

The coalition has funded anger management workshops and curriculum for school staff and created a new student conduct handbook. The group is creating a list of recommendations on dealing with school violence.

To tighten security at James W. Parker Middle School, where teacher John Gillette was killed, school staff now wear identification badges, and cars in the school parking lot sport windshield tags identifying them as staff cars. All school doors are locked during the day except a main entrance.

Jonesboro, Arkansas
Wilma Maiers, UniServ director for the Arkansas Education Association, calls the district's response to the incident "relatively low-key."

"I think part of the reason is the feeling that there really wasn't anything that could have been done at the school to prevent the shooting in the first place," says Maiers.

But some small changes have been made, including the installation of a fence around the middle school campus. Some surrounding districts, Maiers says, hired local police to patrol their campuses. One district hired two new social workers and provided conflict resolution training for teachers.

Meanwhile, state lawmakers are debating several proposals that would make guns less accessible to kids.

Springfield, Oregon
The Springfield school district is considering providing school staff with information about students who have a violent history or criminal record. But the proposed change in policy has been tabled, pending concerns about student confidentiality.

Mike Wintroath/AP Wide World

Preventing Tragedy

This winter, NEA brought representatives from 30 education and child care organizations together to answer the question, "What can we do to make schools safer?"

The groups—including the PTA, School Nurses Association, American Federation of Teachers, and Association of Secondary School Principals—are now creating a manual of model school safety programs.

NEA staffer LaMar Haynes, meanwhile, has taken the helm of the Safe Schools Coalition, a national school violence prevention group.

And, around the country, NEA affiliates and members are working to create effective school safety programs.

A few examples:

Buffalo, New York: There were more than two dozen student assaults against teachers in Buffalo schools last year.

The Buffalo Teachers Federation has gone into action to crack down on violence against school staff by:

- Tracking all assaults and going public with the incidents to pressure district officials to take action.
- Revising the district's code of conduct for students.
- Working with judges and states attorneys to ensure that students aren't allowed to return to a school after they've assaulted someone.
- Pushing for more security officers in high schools.

Contact Phil Rumore, president, Buffalo Teachers Federation, at 716/881-6678.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin: J.W. Riley Elementary School in Milwaukee has an extensive communication plan to protect staff and students when violence breaks out in the school.

"If classrooms hear a PA announcement that 'art, music, and phys ed are cancelled,' everyone goes to the nearest classroom, and the door is locked until trouble subsides," explains Phyllis Deal, a paraprofessional at the school.

Contact Phyllis Deal, paraprofessional, at 414/645-6396.

Ann Arbor, Michigan: Staff at Pioneer High School launched a crackdown on youth gangs and student violence four years ago by taking the following measures:

- Establishing an emergency response/crisis committee of seven school staffers who meet regularly to deal with fights, drugs, bomb threats, and other safety issues.
- Having community assistants from the paraprofessional ranks monitor the hallways, looking for early signs of any trouble. The paraprofessionals also serve as academic partners, assigned to work with at-risk middle schoolers.
- Rewarding students who report signs of trouble with CDs, movie certificates, books, or restaurant coupons.

Contact Percy Brown, student support specialist, at 734/994-2130.

Resources

- NEA has a free packet of information on school safety, including the *Safe Schools Manual* and *School Violence: Perceptions and Solutions.* For copies, contact Richard Verdugo at NEA, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036-3290. E-mail: rverdugo@nea.org. On the Web: www.nea.org/publications.

- The National Crime Prevention Council has two free resources: *Stopping School Violence* and *Making Children, Families, and Communities Safe From Violence.* On the Web: www.ncpc.org. Call 800/WE-PREVENT.

- *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools*, published by the Departments of Justice and Education, helps school communities develop crisis response plans. On the Web: www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/earlywrn.html. For a free copy, call 877/433-7827.

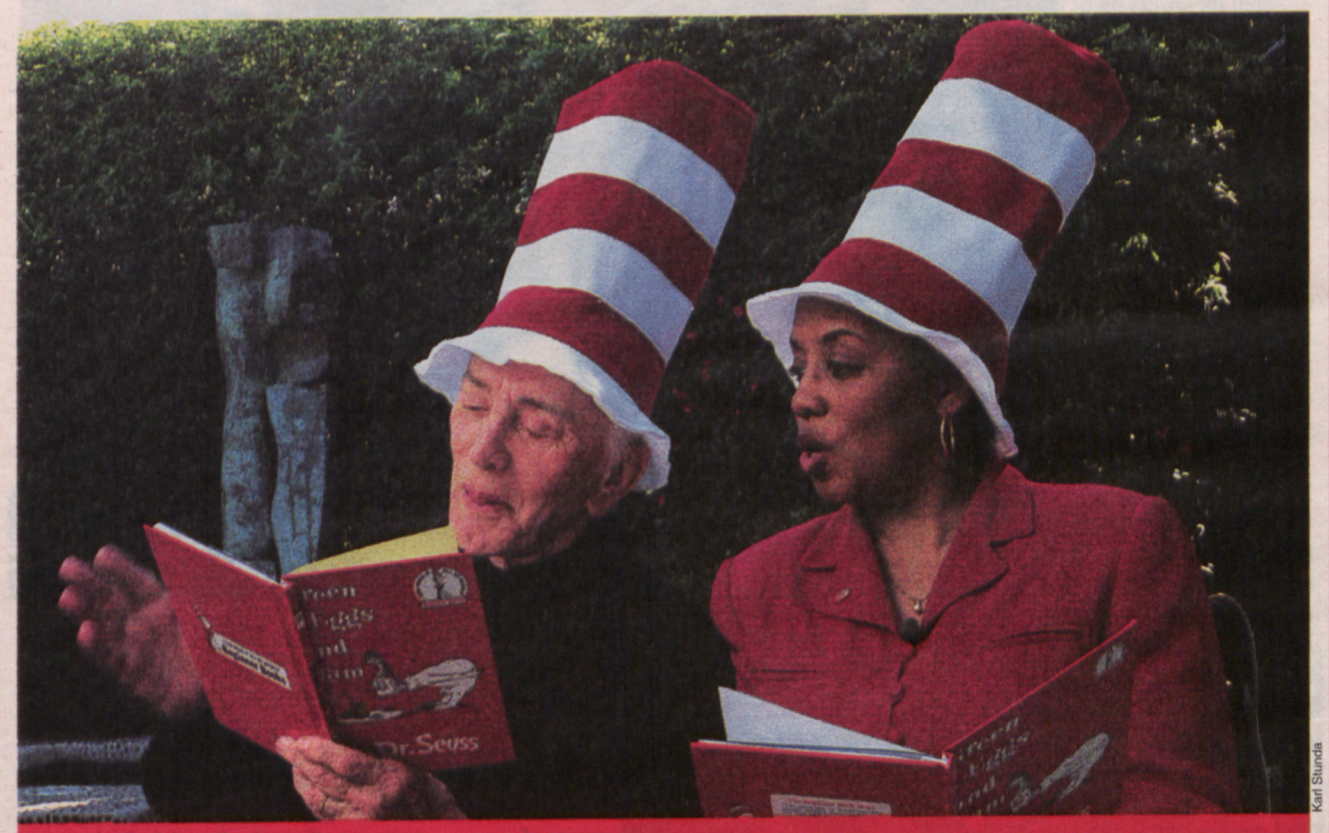
- *Hands Without Guns Initial Workshop Guideline* is a youth workshop guide for teachers. On the Web: www.handswithoutguns.org/wksp1.html. Or call Joshua Horwitz, 202/544-2637.

- The Safe Schools Coalition is a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization that works to reduce violence and promote health and safety in schools. For a list of materials and upcoming conferences, contact Edsel Erickson at 941/778-6652. Or visit the Web at www.ed.mtu.edu/safe.

- *A National Action Plan on School Violence and Kids from 2:00 to 8:00 PM* is a free booklet that includes proposals adopted at a recent national summit of mayors, police chiefs, educators, students, park recreation officials, and health experts. For a copy, write to Ed Somers, U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1620 I St., N.W., Washington, DC 20006. Or call 202/293-7330.

Across the Nation

See 20 Million Kids Read!



Karl Stunda

For NEA's second annual Read Across America, actor Kirk Douglas hosted a celebration at his home with area kids and the NEA Executive Committee's Denise Rockwell (Woods).

Watch them learn how much fun books can be, as the nation celebrates Seuss's 95th birthday.

Thanks to the efforts of millions of people from all walks of life, the celebration of what would have been Dr. Seuss's 95th birthday was bigger, better, and brassier than his 94th.

All across the country, in the tiniest nooks and crannies and in major American cities, more than 1 million NEA members read to an estimated 20 million children on March 2.

Also joining NEA's second annual Read Across America celebration were literally thousands of celebrities—from the worlds of politics, news, sports, and entertainment.

Kirk Douglas did a Green Eggs and Ham duet with NEA Executive Committee member Denise Rockwell (Woods) at his home in Beverly Hills.

Jamie Lee Curtis led a host of stars reading children's Seuss-like essays at the Universal Amphitheater.

Cal Ripken, Jr., the event's honorary chair, read with children before baseball's spring training in Florida.

Among the other stars who played an important part in the event's success: Shaquille O'Neal, James Earl Jones, Miss America Nicole Johnson, Jane Seymour, Graham Nash, Carly Simon, Tomie dePaola, baseball stars Sandy Alomar, Mike Myers, and Jamie Moyer, and basketball stars Cynthia Cooper and Nikki McCrae.

The Clinton Administration jumped on board, encouraging participation in Read Across America and announcing on radio that, "The best and most enjoyable way for children to open their minds is by opening a book."

Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert (R-Illinois) read with children on March 2. And more than half of the nation's governors signed Read Across America day resolutions.

With a year to think up new ideas, there was enough creativity to keep people smiling nationwide.

Jackson, Tennessee, principal Earl Wiman followed through on his promise and ate worms to reward students for reading 10,000 books.

The Navy once again welcomed the Cat in the Hat on board the USS Saipan in Norfolk, Virginia, piping him aboard with pomp and circumstance.

In Culpeper, Virginia, NEA member Laurel Booth talked bakers into donating 1,000 red and white cupcakes for students, which she then arranged to create a giant Cat-in-the-Hat hat.

In several New Jersey communities, hundreds of people showed up at their local libraries for evening pajama parties and bedtime stories.

Across the nation, America's corporate citizens pitched in, too.

Grolier, Random House, and Scholastic donated thousands of books to students across the country. MBNA America Bank, N.A. provided generous financial support. And the Major League Baseball Players' Trust for Children helped to involve players.

Says NEA President Bob Chase: "NEA members seized on a simple idea and turned it into something big and wonderful and instructive."

For More Information

For more news and photos of Read Across America events, visit the Read Across America Web site at www.nea.org/readacross. To be included in the complete wrap-up of the day's events, send your news clips, videotapes, and photos to Read Across America, c/o National Education Association, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

Heroes & Zeroes

A 10-gallon hats off to Lon Burnam, the Texas state representative who accepted teacher Lauri Rule's challenge to walk in her shoes. Burnam spent a week teaching Rule's seventh graders, accepted her paltry $430 weekly paycheck, then joined 500 teachers rallying at the state capitol for $6,000 salary hikes. He sees the need for the raise now.

The Ignominious Ingrate Award goes to the Tempe, Arizona, school board that handed teacher George Alper a five-day suspension without pay for pouring $20,000 of his own money into school projects. The accusation: "unprofessional and insubordinate conduct." It seems Alper didn't follow the rules for accepting and providing donations. Bureaucracy: 1, Brains: 0.

Teachers want to give what they can, a point proudly made by the late Theresa Gail May. Just before the 38-year-old teacher died of cancer in 1986, she made plans to donate family money to help kids in Santa Rosa County, Florida. This year, the foundation that bears her name—funded by her $1.1 million donation—gave out its first grants. They were graciously accepted.

Send a pair of spectacles to New Mexico's shortsighted governor and his campaign to kill collective bargaining rights for public employees. It's just "institutional confrontation," says Governor Gary Johnson, who appears to have missed the old boat and the new unionism, and who probably ain't seen nothing yet.

A legislator who sees things as they are and wants to make them better: Congresswoman Deborah Pryce (R-Ohio). In February, Pryce introduced the Child Abuse Prevention and Enforcement Act, which would boost national funding for victims of child abuse and for prevention efforts. That matters to school employees, who identify 59 percent of all reported cases of child abuse.

On Your Side

Are You Prepared?

A recent U.S. Department of Education survey confirms what NEA members already know: To meet the needs of the future, teachers need more training and support.

Only one in five teachers, according to the survey, feels well prepared to work in a modern classroom.

"To raise the bar higher for quality education, we need sustained professional development for all teachers," says NEA President Bob Chase.

"This includes strict entry-level standards, increased pre-service classroom experience and preparation, mentoring for new teachers, and peer assistance to ensure parents and the public that America's teachers are current in their knowledge and competent in their skills."

The survey of 4,049 public school teachers in every state also shows:

- Only about 20 percent of teachers say they're confident using modern technology or working with students from diverse backgrounds, with limited proficiency in English, or with disabilities.
- All teachers report participating in some professional development activities, but those involved in short-term sessions—less than eight hours—give these experiences low marks. Those engaged in longer training sessions were far more likely to conclude that their teaching ability was improved "a lot."
- Seventy percent of teachers report that mentoring improves teaching significantly.

"These data confirm our dramatic need to get serious about better preparing and supporting teachers in our classrooms," says U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley.

"We'll be hiring over two million teachers over the next 10 years for record numbers of students in classrooms that are already bulging at the seams. Now is the time to rethink how we recruit, prepare, and support America's teachers."

For a free copy of *Teacher Quality: A Report on the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers*, call 877/433-7827. On the Web: http://nces.ed.gov/.

A Slam Dunk for Kids

Announcing a new grants program from Jordan to NFIE to you.

Peter A. Harris/AP

Basketball legend Michael Jordan and his mother, Deloris, visit with middle school students in Reidsville, North Carolina, not far from the Jordan Institute for Families at the University of North Carolina.

Michael Jordan calls his $5 million donation to NEA's National Foundation for the Improvement of Education "a thank you to teachers."

Over the next five years, the Jordan Fundamentals grants program will put money directly into the hands of literally thousands of teachers and paraprofessionals struggling with limited resources.

"I hope that these grants empower more teachers to do what they do best: find creative ways to give kids the means and the inspiration to succeed," said the recently retired basketball superstar in a late-January ceremony that announced the new program.

In the program's first year, NFIE, the foundation created by NEA in 1969, will make 400 $2,500 awards to help defray the cost of educational supplies and enrichment experiences—everything from books and maps to science equipment and trips to museums.

To apply, teachers and paras must work with students in grades 6-12 in United States public secondary schools, where at least 40 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches.

To win, educators must submit "outstanding lesson plans that demonstrate instructional creativity and exemplify high learning expectations for underserved students."

Jordan announced the grants program in the packed gym of John Philip Sousa Middle School in southeast Washington, D.C.

Standing with him: 15 sixth grade members of the math club, NEA President Bob Chase, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, NFIE Executive Director Judith Renyi, and other local dignitaries.

"I have been a role model for more than 14 years now and have taken that responsibility very seriously," Jordan said. "But I feel the true role models are parents and teachers because they are the ones who see the kids the most."

Indeed, Jordan can still recall his most inspirational teachers.

One was his sophomore math teacher—math was his favorite subject—who kept him after school to make sure he stayed focused on school first, then basketball.

Jordan's donation—a minimum of $1 million a year for the next five years—will come from the earnings of his JORDAN Brand, a subsidiary of Nike.

This corporate connection may offer an opportunity to advance another Association goal: improving labor practices that have an impact on children.

At last year's NEA Representative Assembly, delegates endorsed a national effort, the People's Right to Know campaign, which aims to spotlight attention on corporate labor practices abroad. Nike is one of many international companies that have come under fire.

The new NFIE relationship with the JORDAN Brand, notes NEA Executive Director Don Cameron, opens a new channel for dialogue between labor rights advocates and corporate America.

"We hope to be able to leverage this opportunity," says Cameron, "into meaningful action that better protects the world's children and families."

For More Information

The first round of Jordan Fundamentals grants will be awarded next September. The deadline for applications: May 15. For details, contact the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education at 202/822-7840. Or check the Web at www.nfie.org/.

The Bottom Line

Voucher strike one: In Cleveland, one of only two cities in the United States that currently subsidize private school tuition with public tax dollars, a recent audit found that $419,000 was spent on taxi fare for absent voucher students.

Strike two: In Milwaukee, the only other voucher city, the NAACP and People For the American Way are charging that as many as a third of the city's voucher schools are violating state law by failing to admit students on a random, nondiscriminatory basis.

Values: Today's college freshmen are less interested in casual sex than their predecessors. UCLA's annual national survey reports that 40 percent of freshmen now consider sex between new acquaintances to be appropriate. The 1987 level: 52 percent.

Family well-being: The stock market has soared over the past decade, but typical families aren't seeing much benefit. Between 1989 and 1997, says New York University's Edward Wolff, the financial wealth of the median U.S. family actually dropped.

In the States

Attack on Tenure Continues

If passed, a New Hampshire bill would erode due process rights for the state's teachers.

The New Hampshire legislature will vote this spring on a bill that would make it easier for administrators to dismiss teachers by making it harder for teachers to appeal their local school boards' decisions.

That worries Anne Kirby, an elementary school teacher in Gilmanton and a member of NEA New Hampshire's Executive Board.

"If this bill passes, teachers may stop taking even the smallest risks," says Kirby. "For example, if teachers want to try an innovative practice and their principal isn't supportive, they may give up for fear of losing their jobs."

New Hampshire joins a string of states—Virginia, North Carolina, Texas, and South Dakota, among others—that have seen legislative threats to teachers' professional security in recent years.

Legislators pushing the bills argue that it's too hard to fire bad teachers, but the legislation they propose often shreds basic due process rights to fair treatment.

"No one wants to see bad teachers in the classroom," says Dennis Murphy, director of public affairs for NEA New Hampshire.

"The system needs to protect students from bad teachers," Murphy adds, "but it must protect good teachers from bad administrators and politically motivated school boards."

That's where the New Hampshire legislation falls short.

House Bill 341, filed on February 1, creates two major problems for the state's teachers.

First, to win an appeal, a teacher would have to prove that a local school board's decision was "clearly erroneous."

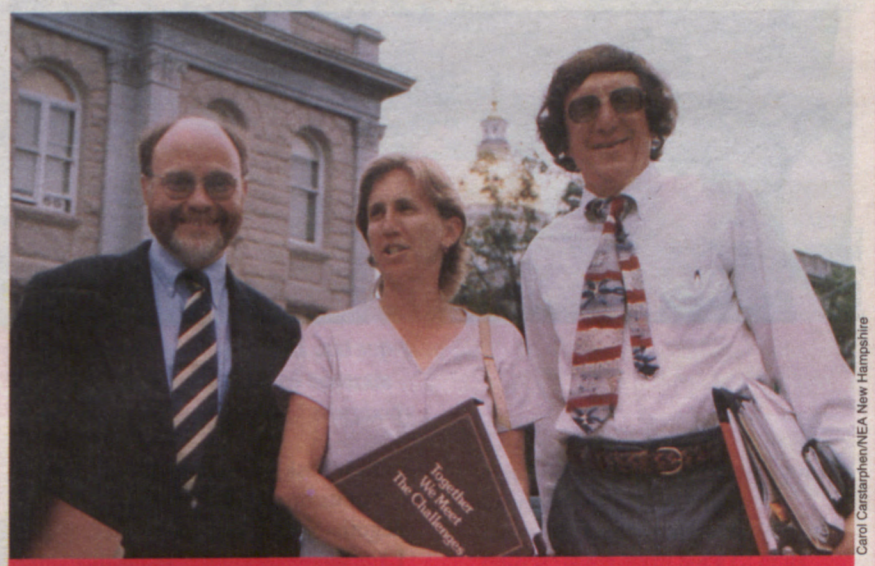
That's a standard, Murphy explains, that "sets the bar so high that a teacher is unlikely ever to clear it."

Second, the bill would invalidate collectively bargained contract clauses that call for binding arbitration.

"We view that as a full frontal assault on the right of employees to bargain collectively with employers," says Murphy.

What makes the bill even more disturbing: It has the support of New Hampshire Governor Jeanne Shaheen, a candidate supported by NEA-New Hampshire in the last election.

"We were extremely disappointed when the governor told us she was going to support the bill," Murphy says, "because we had worked with her to improve current non-renewal procedures."



Carol Carstarphen/NEA New Hampshire

Fighting to preserve due process are, from left to right, NEA New Hampshire staff attorney Jim Allmendinger and executive board members Anne Kirby and Brian Wazlaw.

Anne Kirby and Brian Wazlaw, a science teacher at Exeter High School, represented teachers on the Task Force on Teacher Non-Renewal, which met for three months beginning last July.

Charged by Shaheen with streamlining the current non-renewal law, the task force included teachers, school board members, principals, state legislators, and state education officials.

"I was hopeful the committee's work wouldn't be contentious," Kirby says, but that wasn't to be. One stumbling-block issue emerged: identifying a fair process that would allow a teacher to appeal a non-renewal decision.

NEA New Hampshire originally wanted appeals to go before an independent arbitrator, but was willing to live, notes Exeter High teacher Wazlaw, with "any fair standard for appeal review.

"That could have been the State Board of Education, an administrative law judge, or a personnel board," Wazlaw says.

The state school board association, unfortunately, refused to budge an inch on negotiating a compromise. In the absence of consensus, the governor's office chose the wording that, notes Wazlaw, "we found greatly disappointing."

New Hampshire teachers are now working to stop the bill's passage. Chances are the bill will pass in the Republican-dominated House, so Association members are focusing their opposition on the state Senate, which has a new Democratic majority.

For More Information

Contact Dennis Murphy, NEA New Hampshire director of public affairs, at 603/224-7751. Send E-mail to DMurphy@nea.org.

Dialoguing With Davis
Invoking a sense of urgency to increase student achievement, California Governor Gray Davis has called for $444 million in new education spending, including $93 million for a reading improvement program.

Four of the governor's proposed measures relate to educators: a school accountability plan, a teacher evaluation system based on peer review, a high school exit exam, and a new reading program containing additional training in phonics for reading teachers.

Some of the governor's proposals are controversial and have sparked spirited discussion. Davis continues an open dialogue with California Teachers Association leaders.

CTA is working to ensure that any legislation enacted addresses teacher concerns and supports the governor's commitment to promote excellence in California schools.

Beware, Delaware
Governor Thomas Carper's teacher accountability recommendations have been labeled "punitive and overly burdensome" by the Delaware State Education Association.

Among other things, the governor is recommending that:

- Grounds for teacher termination include an unsatisfactory evaluation based on student performance.
- Twenty percent of a teacher's evaluation be based on "student growth" and all evaluations be linked to state test scores.
- Two unsuccessful evaluations lead to a loss of license.

Association leaders have pointed out that the plan holds teachers accountable for factors over which they have no control.

Missing, they stress, are mention of either an autonomous professional standards board for teachers or "the crucial role of community shared decision making."

Digging Up Donations
In just over 15 months of operation, the Idaho Education Association's Children's Fund has donated some $26,000 to needy children.

Better reading: The latest results from the nation's most in-depth look at student reading skills show across-the-board improvement for 12th graders. For more on the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress results: www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard.

Better math: New numbers show that student math achievement is up, but scores remain low in high-poverty schools, where, on average, 40 percent of math teachers haven't majored or minored in math. For more: www.ctredpol.org/pubs/issue_briefs.html.

Jails: The number of state and federal prisoners has more than tripled since 1980. The average cost per inmate in 1994: $15,000. The average pupil cost for the same period: $5,911. For more: www.demographics.com/publications/ad/96_ad/9602_ad/ad880.htm.

Arms: U.S. military spending this year will double the combined military spending of every U.S. adversary, even before President Clinton's proposed defense hike. Notes retired Rear Admiral Eugene Carroll: "We're in an arms race with ourselves."

At the Bargaining Table

Negotiating Class Size

NEA members in Springfield, Massachusetts, have ratified a three-year contract that limits class size, hikes salaries 9 percent, adds domestic partner insurance coverage, and increases longevity payments.

Class size provisions guarantee maximum kindergarten class sizes of 25 by 2000-2001, maximum K-1 class sizes of 25 by 2001-2002, and maximum K-2 class sizes of 25 by 2002-2003.

Persistence Pays Off

With a November ratification vote, two years of hard struggle came to a welcome end for the 240 members of the Wayne (New York) Teachers Association.

Making it happen were WTA President Lynda Young, chief negotiator Marcia Standera and her team, and local members, who never stopped demonstrating and publicly fighting for a better contract.

"When we started this process, the community and the school board were not cooperative," says Young.

"But in April 1998, NEA-New York President Greg Nash came out to speak, our local began to picket and put out flyers, and we started to feel things turning around. Parents became supportive because some very special teachers left for better salaries and benefits elsewhere."

The settlement means good salary increases—3.5 percent for each of the first three years and 3.75 percent for the last year. Plus, teachers with master's degrees will get significantly higher salary rewards.

WTA also negotiated retiree health insurance that includes a $1,000-a-year premium payment by the district—about 50 percent of the total premium—for up to 10 years. "So now," boasts Young, "every member who retires gets health care."

What's next? "We'll work on keeping the concern and support of the parents, and we'll get involved in community politics," Young pledges. "And we'll maintain the unity we've built. Believe me, we plan to keep alive the memory of those 240 banana yellow T-shirts."

Windy City Part-Timers Win

Stacey Wescott

Standing tall in front of Chicago's Columbia College are new NEA members, from left, Michael Caplan, Ellen Shapiro, Joe Laiacona, and Jack Behrend.

In Chicago, part-time professors make news by showing that organizing pays.

In many ways, Columbia College in Chicago is unique. It's an open-admissions, urban private college that focuses on preparing students for careers in the arts.

But, when it comes to the use—and abuse—of part-time faculty, the college is in step with the rest of the nation.

The national trend has become familiar: Instead of full-time faculty, more colleges use part-timers who get few benefits and earn far less per course than their full-time counterparts.

The numbers bear out the trend. In 1970, 20 percent of the nation's higher education faculty were part-timers. Today, it's 45 percent—and climbing.

At Chicago's Columbia College, the percentage of faculty who work part-time is—and has always been—high. Of 1,000 professors, about 800 work part-time.

Don't ask about the salaries.

"In its brochures," says Association negotiator and part-time professor Joe Laiacona, "the college brags that students take courses from a faculty that works in the professions we teach. The college implies we're taking time out from our $100,000-a-year jobs to teach on the side.

"In fact," Laiacona says, "only 20 percent of our part-timers have a total annual income, from all sources, of more than $40,000. Half earned less than $20,000 in 1997."

No surprise, then, that the College's part-timers voted overwhelmingly last year to join the Part-Time Faculty Association, an NEA affiliate.

Since then, the new Association members negotiated a contract that will bring them pay increases of at least 30 percent. Some part-timers will see their incomes double.

Under the new agreement, minimum pay for three-credit courses will go up from $1,500 to $2,100 over the life of the contract, with most of the increase in the first year. For part-timers with more seniority, minimum pay will go up to $3,200.

And money's just the tip of the iceberg. The new contract provides, for the first time, payment for classes that are cancelled and participation in academic decision making.

"But most important," says Laiacona, "part-timers now have an organization of their own that's only begun the fight to improve working conditions for higher education's massive tribe of ill-used and undervalued academic nomads.

"We can't win true equality for part-timers, nor can we make major inroads on some of the big issues like health insurance," Laiacona adds, "until the overwhelming majority of part-timers across the city have unionized."

With help from the Illinois Education Association, that's what the Part-Time Faculty Association plans to do.

Association members have already sponsored a citywide conference on part-time faculty issues. And they're now putting together a citywide organizing committee.

The group's goal: to improve conditions for part-time faculty across the city by establishing minimum salaries, a benefits pool, and a hiring hall.

It's a tall order. "But so was winning a first-time collective bargaining agreement," Laiacona says.

For More Information

For details, check the Web at www.pfac.org or call IEA organizer Tom Suhrbur at 630/495-3250.

The Bottom Line

Exams: The widely publicized Massachusetts test that last spring failed high percentages of prospective teachers has "poor validity," say researchers led by Boston College measurement expert Walter Haney. For more: http://epaa.asu.edu.

Plenty of choices: Alternate public school programs for students who have behavioral problems or are behind grade level now total 8,639, according to Market Data Retrieval. Also now operating are 3,657 public magnet schools and 970 public charter schools.

Private schools: Financier Ted Forstmann appeared on *Oprah* in February to promote the Children's Scholarship Fund, a $170 million effort to move students out of public schools. Parents who win the Fund's April lottery will get $1,000 a year for K-8 private tuition.

Motivating students: The Urban League's new Thurgood Marshall Achievers Society aims to encourage students to pay more attention to school work. The network will offer college scholarships to qualifying youngsters from local chapters.

At the Local Level

Becoming Equal Partners

School support employees join NEA for lots of reasons, including an equal voice at the table.

Tennessee school secretary Martha Campbell does work that makes it easier for teachers to teach. She keeps the books, answers phones, types, and sticks Band-Aids on kids. And she once removed a dead cat from the playground—because nobody else was around to do the job.

Campbell, who works at Denmark Elementary School, is clearly an equal partner in the education of children. But until not so long ago, she and other school support employees weren't exactly equal in the eyes of the Jackson-Madison County school system.

Jackson-Madison school support employees received lower percentage raises than teachers and, unlike teachers, paid a share of their health insurance premiums. Moreover, support staff had no one to speak up for their rights—or even tell them what rights they *did* enjoy.

Things began to change in 1996, when the Tennessee Education Association—long a "teacher-only" organization—authorized its local affiliates to grant full rights and equal status to support staff. Responding to the challenge, the Jackson-Madison County Education Association started to actively organize and represent ESP.

Now JMCEA—which has signed up more than 200 new ESP members in the past two years—includes support staff in leadership positions and addresses ESP concerns through regular "meet and confer" sessions with the school board budget committee.

Some dividends: Last year, JMCEA Teacher Welfare Committee members persuaded county commissioners to provide *equal* pay increases and health care premiums to teachers and support staff—and boost ESP pensions to the maximum level allowed by the state.

Not bad, considering that Tennessee ESP aren't even covered by a bargaining law.

Jackson-Madison County Education Association President Jimmy Bailey, a technology teacher at North Parkway Middle School, thinks that ESP organizing just makes good sense.

In districts where teachers and support staff are represented by separate professional organizations, "everybody battles over the same piece of pie," he points out. "We share common issues, and besides, if we in NEA don't go out there and organize these people, somebody else is going to."

Campbell, elected last year to the Jackson-Madison County Education Association executive board, likens teacher-ESP unity building to "mending a hole in the net."

"We were all working together for the same thing anyway in the past and now we're working with the Association," she says. "This has brought us all closer to one another."

That's a message you'll hear in states from Alabama to Massachusetts, where NEA affiliates are organizing support personnel (see side column).

As of August 31, 1998, NEA's ESP membership stood at 281,500. That's more than double the number of school support employees who belonged to NEA just 10 years ago.

For More Information

Send E-mail to Jimmy Bailey, president of the Jackson-Madison County Education Association, at baileyj5@ten-nash.ten.k12.tn.us.

For more information on issues of concern to ESP, send E-mail to NEA ESP program coordinator Roxanne Dove at RDove@nea.org.

For a wealth of ESP resources—plus access to the NEA ESP bulletin board—go to www.nea.org/esp.

Lisa Waddell Buser

When teachers and school support employees join together in the NEA, says Tennessee school secretary Martha Campbell, it's like "mending a hole in the net."

Nebraska Welcomes ESP

Since Nebraska State Education Association members voted last year to welcome educational support employees, support staff in districts from Arcadia to Millard have joined the Association family.

Jane Dambrosia, a secretary at Millard's Cody Elementary School, was the first ESP to join the Millard Education Association.

"Support staff need Association support to take on issues like low pay, high workloads, and the school board's failure to acknowledge the talents and contributions of support staff," Dambrosia says.

Oklahomans Join Up

Alarmed by rumors of cafeteria privatization, ESP in Guthrie, Oklahoma, have formed their own NEA local affiliate.

"I wanted someone to back us," says cafeteria manager Gayla Stokes, "and the more questions I asked, the more answers I received from the Oklahoma Education Association.

"We don't want to be radical," Stokes adds. "We just want to be shown some respect, as anyone would."

In Illinois, 1,000 Each Year

The Illinois Education Association-NEA signs up some 1,000 new ESP members a year, reports IEA-NEA ESP coordinator Stacy Burroughs.

Recent election victories in Illinois include: Woodridge SD 68 (147 secretaries, clerks, and paraeducators), Community Consolidated SD 204 (16 support employees), Bremen Community High SD (all 59 support employees), Dixon USD 170 (47 paraeducators and aides), and East Maine SD 63 (44 secretaries and clerical employees).

"Aside from ESP concern about issues like wages and hours, we're seeing a lot of concern over educational and health and safety issues," Burroughs reports.

"And across the board," stresses Burroughs, "support employees want the recognition they deserve as equal players in their districts."

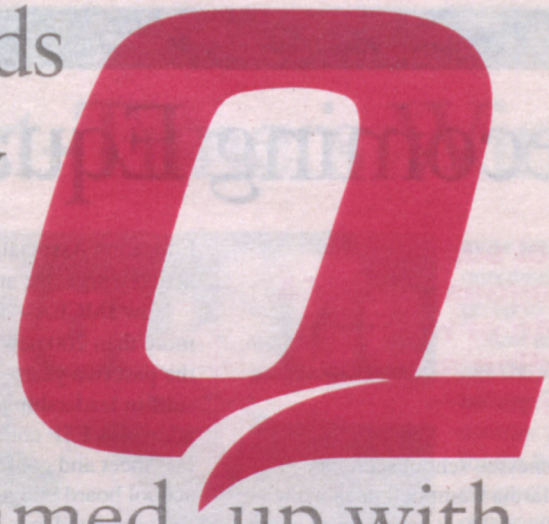
Incentives: Several Indiana high schools, taking advantage of a 1997 state law, are now awarding checks to students who graduate with honors. School officials in Hammond expect at least 38 graduates to walk away with $800 each this spring.

Administrators: The national organizations of elementary and secondary principals are reporting that fewer teachers want to switch into administration. Half the schools with 1998-99 principal vacancies, says a new study, had trouble filling them.

Enrollment: Over a half-million new students are crowding America's public schools this year, one reason why 2,530 year-round schools are now in operation. California has both the most new students—112,300 in all—and the most year-round schools—1,408.

Dress code: Families spent about $900 million on school uniforms last year. That sum—7 percent of all dollars spent on kids clothing—will rise next year when New York City schools start requiring uniforms at the elementary level.

It can be difficult teaching kids with technology. Especially when you still have so much to learn about it yourself. That's why Compaq has teamed up with the renowned T.H.E. Institute to create advanCE: Advantage Compaq Education. Compaq's curriculum has five innovative and challenging classes that will show you how to integrate technology into your classroom, develop exciting classroom presentations and navigate your way around the Web with ease. Call 1-800-88-TEACH or visit us at www.compaq.com/education/advance. So you can teach your kids with confidence. Instead of the other way around.



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*For the NEA-Sponsored Money Market Account the minimum amount to open the account and obtain the Annual Percentage Yield (APY) is $500. For balances of $50,000 or more the APY is 5.22%. The APYs are valid from 2/1/99 - 2/7/99 and are based on a bonus rate of 1% for the first 60 days. The current annual percentage yields without the bonus are:

balances of less than $500	4.23%
balances of $500 to $49,999	4.80%
balances of $50,000 or more	5.05%

The rates may change after the account is opened. Fees could reduce the earnings of the account. All other bank rates in the comparison chart are accurate as of 2/2/99 and the rates may be higher for higher balances. Source – *BISYS Research Services.*

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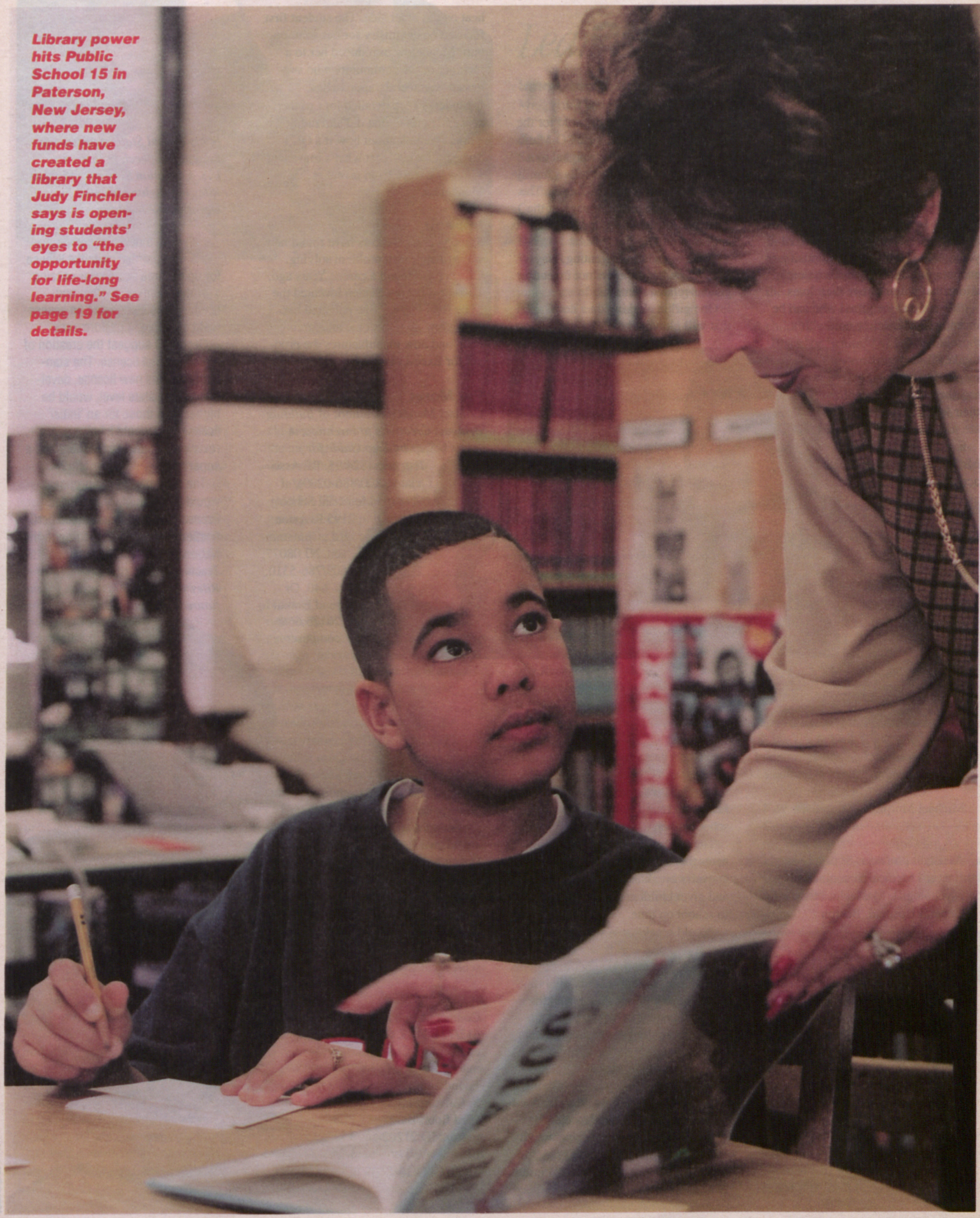
Library power hits Public School 15 in Paterson, New Jersey, where new funds have created a library that Judy Finchler says is opening students' eyes to "the opportunity for life-long learning." See page 19 for details.



Rachelle Omenson

Innovators

Think Inventions

Who:
Elaine Mendelow

Job:
Teacher of the gifted, grades 2, 3, 4, Memorial School, Cinnaminson, New Jersey

Bright Idea:
For 14 years, Mendelow has stirred young minds through inventions, encouraging students to devise creations that will improve their lives.

"It's not just the gifted who can be inventors," Mendelow notes. "It's those divergent thinkers" who can be inspired to pull together all aspects of their learning to create something new.

Every year, Mendelow runs interactive invention assemblies at each school in her district. Students brainstorm in groups and leave the assemblies psyched, application forms in hand.

Last year, Cinnaminson students submitted 100 inventions to the district's contest.

Jordon Wompierski and Carly Snyder, tired of waiting in the cold for the school bus, created JC's Bus-O-Matic. A bus transmitter sends a signal to a receiver in the home that tells a family when the bus is a half mile away. The invention made the front page of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the students appeared on *The Today Show*.

"Lots of girls are inventing," says Mendelow, "and they're not inventing gender-related items."

One girl is working on a doorknob that will glow in the dark if there's heat on the other side. The student first focused on chemistry for her solution, until Mendelow introduced her to a member of the community who suggested engineering approaches.

Students keep detailed logs of their process, noting what did and didn't work. "We talk about how it's OK to make mistakes—that what's important is how we learn from mistakes," says Mendelow.

Rachelle Omenson

Impact:
Some young inventors have found new ways to approach problem solving. Others have found a career. Years ago, 10-year-old Amy Seiden invented the "The Reel Putter." She patented her idea, grew up to become an entrepreneur, and now manufactures the product for Exec-U-Putt Inc.

For More:
Contact Mendelow, author of *Building Bridges: Creativity to Invention: A Step-by-Step Guide for Teachers* ($24.95, BE Associates, 800/886-0209), at Memorial School, 2195 Riverton Rd., Cinnaminson, NJ 08077, 609/786-5310, ext. 640. Or send E-mail to 76125.66@compuserve.com.

Teaching's Future

In his annual State of American Education speech in February, U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley highlighted his plan for elevating the teaching profession:

"First, a new teacher would be granted an initial license for up to three years after passing a written exam of content and teaching knowledge and an assessment of teaching performance. . . .

Second, I suggest the creation of a professional license. The standards for this new license, developed at the state level, would be higher than those for an 'initial' license, and would involve peer review by a panel of teachers and a supervisor. . . .

The third part of my proposal would be a voluntary advanced license such as the advanced certification that now exists through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards."

Riley will discuss his vision for the future of education in the May issue of NEA Today.

Champion of Breakfast

Who:
Michael Murphy

Job:
Assistant professor of psychology, Harvard Medical School; child psychologist, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston

Bright Idea:
Instead of giving free breakfasts to eligible poor children before school starts, says Murphy, give all children a free breakfast—in the classroom, at the start of the school day.

Murphy, working with the Abell Foundation, is implementing this breakfast program in Baltimore.

Murphy started his research in 1997 in three elementary schools, and has since expanded to 41. In each school, a majority of the students were eligible for free or reduced price breakfasts. But fewer than a third would show up for breakfast—and many wouldn't show for school either.

The universal free breakfast eliminates the stigma attached to the "poverty breakfast," Murphy notes, and gives children a good reason to get to school on time.

A cold breakfast is served—usually cereal or a bagel, milk, and juice or fruit—during morning announcements to minimize loss of instructional time.

"I research things that make kids function better," says Murphy. And one of those things is breakfast.

Impact:
In the first group of schools offering a universal free breakfast, Murphy documented improved attendance, decreased tardiness, less hyperactivity in the classroom, and better grades in math. In this year's much larger group, Murphy has already determined that attendance is up in 31 schools offering the universal free breakfast program; in 15 control schools, attendance is down slightly. In December, he will compare results of the statewide standardized tests taken this spring to see if there has been an impact on test scores.

For More:
Contact Murphy at 617/724-3163. Or contact Sita Culman at the Abell Foundation, 111 S. Calvert St., 23rd floor, Baltimore, MD 21202-6174, 410/547-1300, Fax 410/539-6579.

Michael Quan

Marc Bondarenko

A Real **Head Start**

A major gap in achievement divides students at opposite ends of the socioeconomic scale—and that gap widens as children advance through school. Dr. Craig Ramey, director of the Civitan International Research Center at the University of Alabama in Birmingham, is examining ways to remedy this crisis. The center will send a report to Congress this summer on the findings of the recently completed Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project, begun in 1991.

How early should educational intervention begin?

We now have Early Head Start beginning in the first year of life. These programs are modeled on research that suggests that if we begin earlier, we can get better payoffs.

It's not surprising that if we wait until age four, when Head Start typically begins, children will already have substantial and measurable cognitive, linguistic, and social deficits. The extent to which these can be reversed remains to be seen.

What causes the gap in achievement to widen during the elementary years?

During the school year, children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to learn at the same rate as their more advantaged peers. But they start further behind—especially when these children are in a very good school system, since their peers tend to be well above average and tend to have lots of home support.

Over the summer, learning tends to fall off for disadvantaged children, while others go to camps, summer classes, and on vacation. You can see the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged students grow.

It looks as if schools aren't doing a good job. That's not true. Schools are getting a bum rap. It's the time out of school that's taking its toll.

Where should we put the resources?

It doesn't come as a surprise that we need to help disadvantaged children get more education all day long and through the summer. As a preventive, we must begin high-quality programs for disadvantaged children by the second year of life.

Additional effort must be made when youngsters get to school. This includes small class size, individual attention, and good after-school and summer school programs.

Then we can have disadvantaged students doing substantially better in school. No one knows how long you have to continue these efforts. After all, advantaged parents continue to offer support at least through college.

We have to face up to it. There's a major disparity between the haves and the have-nots because we're not putting sufficient resources into our schools. That's what the research shows.

Ramey's book Going to School *(Goddard), co-authored by Sharon L. Ramey, will be published July 1. Their book* Right from Birth *(Goddard), released in January, discusses building a foundation for learning. Send E-mail to Ramey at cramey@uab.edu or contact the Civitan Center at 205/934-8900. On the Web at www.circ.uab.edu.*

Learn Not **To Divide**

Innovator:
Marguerite Wright

Job:
Senior clinical and research psychologist, Center for the Vulnerable Child at Children's Hospital, Oakland, California

Bright Idea:
Wright encourages parents and educators to take advantage of the racial innocence of children's early years to help Black and biracial children development their self-esteem and their openness toward one another.

"It is extremely important for schools to address this issue," stresses Wright, "especially in this time of prosperity. Not to do so has the potential to destroy this country."

Educators can help contribute to a less racially divisive world by being aware of how their own language, behaviors, and messages keep racism alive in the classroom, says Wright, author of *I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla: Raising Happy, Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World* (Jossey-Bass).

"Many teachers expect Black children not to behave or do as well as whites," Wright notes. "They tend to call on them less, take less interest in them, and discourage them from reaching their potential.

"Black children pick up these messages from the time they are in grade school, and this has a huge and lasting impact on them," says Wright.

But Wright is quick to add that "there are many teachers who see beyond race and help children fulfill their potential."

Wright offers guidelines for educators, urging them to learn how children develop race awareness.

"How young children think about race is different from how teenagers think about it," says Wright. "Developmentally, young Black and biracial children are incapable of understanding the concept of race.

"Teachers can't assume that young children will understand labels like 'Black' or 'white,'" Wright adds. "Besides, they're divisive terms."

Wright advises schools to be proactive—ensure diversity in the classroom, among staff, in textbooks, and on posters. Sensitivity trainings year-round, before a racial conflict occurs, "can help teachers understand the basic humanness of people, our common denominators, and that skin color is not a natural separator among people."

David Bacon

For More:
Contact Wright at 510/428-3783. Visit the Web at www.nesonline.com for highlights of a March online discussion on resolving racial conflict among high school students.

Test Scores and **Rural Schools**

Although the potential misuse of test scores is an issue for schools nationwide, it can have an especially strong impact on small and rural schools, because of their sizes and demographics. . . .

When lower test scores mean school sanctions, small communities with high poverty rates or diverse populations face serious consequences.

Moreover, in many small and rural schools, only a handful of students may have taken the test upon which fiscal decisions are based. . . .

Small changes in the student population, such as the movement in or out of just one or two families with high- or low-scoring children, can introduce a particularly powerful bias.

Source: "The Use and Misuse of Test Scores" by Marty Strange, *The Rural Challenge News*, Winter 1999. On the Web: www.ruralchallenge.org.

Students &

Good Stuff

Challenged Books
Rationales for Challenged Books, a new CD-ROM resource from the National Council of Teachers of English, offers concise, informative rationales for more than 200 frequently taught literary works that have been challenged and removed from classroom and library shelves. Rationales cover materials for grades K-12—with an emphasis on middle school and high school levels—by authors including Richard Wright, John Steinbeck, Judy Blume, and Toni Morrison. $39.95, stock #38276-0015, from NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801-1096, 877/369-6283.

Great Listening
The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has released four new sets of audiobooks: *How To Develop Student Creativity*, *How To Mentor in the Midst of Change*, *How To Solve Typical School Problems*, and *Teaching and Joy* (teachers recall special moments in their careers). Each two-cassette set is $29.95 plus $3 s&h from ASCD, P.O. Box 79760, Baltimore, MD 21279, 800/933-2723. Or visit the Web at www.ascd.org.

Growing Up Gay
Growing Up Gay, Growing Up Lesbian is a literary anthology geared to gay and lesbian youth, featuring the writing of James Baldwin, Rita Mae Brown, Martina Navratilova, and others, along with works by contemporary high school students. $9.95 plus $3 s&h (request a free teaching guide) from The New Press, 450 West 41 St., 6th floor, New York, NY 10036, 800/233-4830.

Human Rights Education
Human Rights USA provides a wide range of resources on human rights history, including free posters and resource notebooks on children's rights, indigenous people's rights, and the death penalty ($5 each). Also available: a resource kit ($50) with booklets on rights issues, a video, CD-ROM, K-12 resource books, and bibliographies. For more information, contact Human Rights USA, 310 Fourth Ave. S., Suite 100, Minneapolis, MN 55415, 888/473-3828. Or visit the Web at www.hrusa.org.

You know you have a problem when . . .

"Problems and issues are only discussed—action is never taken to resolve them."

Linda McIntosh, second grade teacher, Mt. Vernon, Illinois

Dilemma

Supporting Gay Students

How do you support students who are struggling with their sexual orientation?

Ted Pitts

I support these students in the following ways:

■ Taking the risk of offering with other colleagues a confidential Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered Support Group for students, and posting notices at school that students may approach me or two other colleagues for information on the support group.

■ Inviting all staff to wear "rainbow stickers" on our school ID badges to signify we are open to talking to students with sexual orientation issues. We have posters around the school explaining the stickers.

Steve Bloom
Licensed school social worker
Roseville, Minnesota

Schools need to do a better job of stopping gay bashing. Sadly, some staff turn their heads when they hear a student referred to as a "fag" or "queer." One doesn't need to "condone" homosexuality to send the message that no one's dignity or self-worth will be stripped in the classroom.

Dena Hellums
Seventh grade language arts and social studies teacher
Clackamas, Oregon

I take their concerns very seriously and usually follow these guidelines:

■ Be yourself.

■ Remember that students may be experiencing grief reactions, since most teens know that society says they are "wrong."

■ Students may appear confused about their orientation, when in fact they're only confused with what terminology to use. Use the vocabulary the student uses.

■ Use the term "same sex feeling" if the student appears uneasy with other vocabulary.

■ If you don't feel comfortable addressing some issues, find a professional agency that does.

■ Thank the student for trusting you.

■ Stop any harassment.

■ Respect confidentiality. The teachers lounge has caused many students harm.

Phil Carlson
Middle school science teacher
West Palm Beach, Florida

This is a very touchy subject. But if a student trusts me enough to come to me, I'm going to open my mind and push my personal feelings aside for the sake of this child.

First, I listen carefully. Then I ask questions to gauge their feelings and find out how I can help.

Don't be judgmental. Don't make light of the student's concerns and fears. Ask the guidance counselor for advice, without disclosing the student's identity. Be a good example to this student by being an educator who cares and respects feelings.

Heidi Arias
High school resource department chair
Enterprise, Utah

I am an out gay Spanish teacher. One of the reasons I am out is so that our gay/bi-sexual/transgendered youth can turn to a teacher who refuses to hide the life she was meant to live, one who will not judge, push, criticize, or be horrified. A teacher whose life is open—as all wholesome, caring lives should be—and there when students need me.

Elena Picado
Spanish teacher
Little Rock, Arkansas

When discussing civil liberties in my civics class, I bring up the issue of homophobia. I relate experiences I've had, including going to a Pride March. I reassure my students that the American Medical Association has removed homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses. I mention famous people who happened to be gay.

I try to help all my students make the transition to a view of tolerance. I let them know I was raised homophobic but outgrew this faulty premise.

As a result of this outreach, a number of students have felt comfortable enough to approach me with their "dark secret." I reassure them, and I counsel them that they will survive and life can be good.

Mel "Skip" Didier, Jr.
High school teacher/coach
Lafayette, Louisiana

Got an Answer?

How do you teach today's lessons with yesteryear's textbooks?

Send your answer by regular mail, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail to dilemma 2@neatoday.nea.org. Please include your job title and grade level, if applicable.

Published respondents will receive a bright *NEA Today* mug!

Strategies

You know you've been successful when . . .

"Your most difficult students continue to visit and reflect on lessons learned years after they've progressed."

Paula Brown, fourth grade teacher, Knoxville, Tennessee

Delight

Libraries Give Learning a Lift

New Jersey schools are finding that a little library funding can inspire a lot of learning.

Brenda Thomas's library at Public School 28 in Paterson New Jersey can be a lively place, filled with energetic elementary students poring over bright material handed out during a presentation on postage stamps.

At other times, the library can have "a calming effect on students who may need some quiet time," says Thomas. "This is a warm, non-threatening place for them."

Either way, the library is a far cry from the ragged resource it was eight years ago. "It was in bad shape, and the books were outdated," Thomas recalls.

Thanks to a infusion of dollars from the school budget and private funds, the library now boasts a "friendliness" that seems to beckon students.

Rugs, bean bag chairs, posters of comic book heroes, four computers, and 5,500 books decorate the library that serves 700 students in K-4.

"Kids love coming here," says Thomas, who now views her renovated library as "an integral part of the learning process."

One corner is designated for dramatic play therapy, supervised by a member of the child study team. The "special interest corner" offers students privacy to read books on hygiene and other sensitive matters.

Another area is set aside for teachers to complete lesson plans or "just sit and read a book," says Thomas.

Thomas keeps abreast of curriculum changes "so that the library can truly be a resource for teachers.

"I also try to help them get whatever they need within 24 hours," she adds, "because I know it's tough when you have just a half hour to plan a lesson."

Thomas arranges for book talks and field trips, and brings in members of the community to mentor students. Guest readers from local businesses and the city council enliven the library calendar. And parent volunteers help keep the library operating smoothly.

Librarian Brenda Thomas has turned her renovated school library into an energized education hub for K-4 students and staff at Public School 28 in Paterson, New Jersey.

Photos by Rachelle Omenson

"Being here is making a difference," says Thomas, who was named her school's 1993 teacher of the year. "Kids and teachers can have some alone time here, and kids can feel safe. And they don't have to leave the building to get resources they need."

At Public School 15, the library is smaller—not much larger than a classroom. Yet thanks again to a bigger budget in recent years and private funds, it offers 8,000 volumes, three computers, videos, and a laptop.

"Here the kids can make choices, learn research skills, and recognize that libraries offer the opportunity for life-long learning," says Judy Finchler, the school's library media specialist.

Many of the 1,100 students at her school are doing selective reading, Finchler notes—some even "trading in pulp fiction for finer literature."

When Finchler's not teaching reading, helping with homework, or coaching students on their oral presentations for the state standards test, she's inviting teachers to use her as a resource.

"I'll suggest ways to make a subject more pleasurable and uncomplicated," says Finchler. This can mean creating a topic outline, reassessing a child's ability to learn aspects of the subject, or recommending a relevant Web site.

"The world the kids are going out into is vast," says Finchler. "The library is a good place to shift between school and that world."

For More Information

Contact Judy Finchler at 973/225-0212 or Brenda Thomas at 973/225-5044.

Idea Exchange

High-Tech Grammar

With the emphasis on the Standards of Learning testing in Virginia, I need to prepare my seventh and eighth graders for the grammar portions as well as the technology tests.

I have my students work in small groups and use Powerpoint or ClarisWorks to prepare a presentation for each of the major portions of grammar covered on the tests.

Students must present the skills, provide the rules, show examples, and test their classmates' level of understanding, using the computer to prepare that quiz.

Students take ownership of the learning, cover the skills needed for the standards test, and use technology to accomplish the task.

Richard Poole
Newport News, Virginia

Board with Magnets?

Have a magnetic chalkboard? Have students create personal magnets, using self-stick labels cut to size and business card-size magnets you've received from businesses or bought at a supply store.

I use the magnets to chart assignments, make new seating arrangements, assign students to cars for field trips, and more.

The kids love them, and they'll have a magnet to take home at the end of the year.

Marie Markstrom
Anchorage, Alaska

Works4Me
nea's e-mail classroom tip of the week!

Have a great idea? Pass along your tips to *NEA Today*, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail: ideas@neatoday.nea.org.

For more tips, check out NEA's weekly E-mail service, Works4Me. To sign up, send an E-mail to lyris@list.nea.org.

- In the "subject" line, type: sign me up, NEA!
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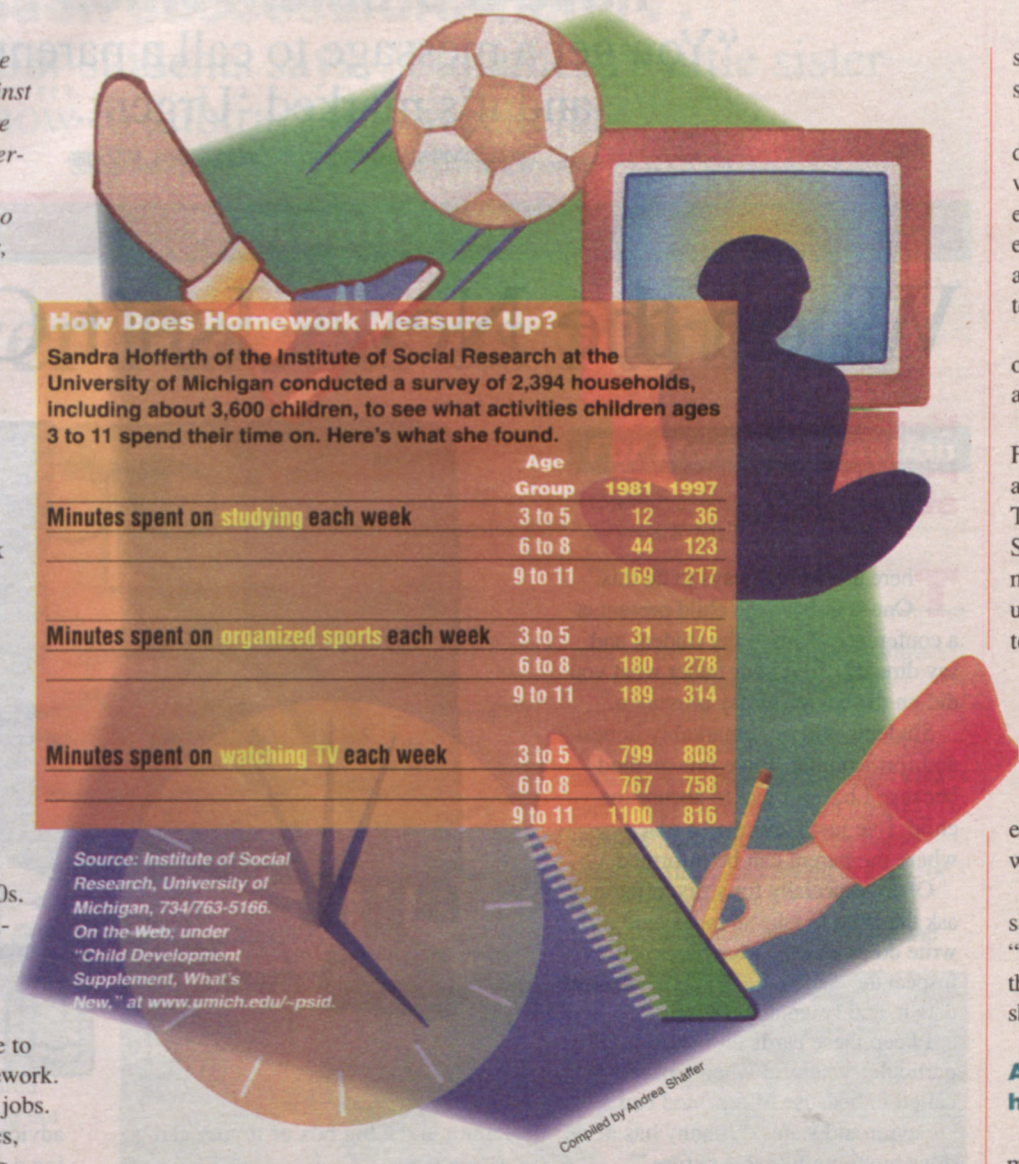
Inside Scoop

Homework: Time To Turn It In?

Homework—students have traditionally railed against it. Now some parents are protesting, saying homework overload places an added burden on family schedules. Homework also creates extra work for educators, who increasingly have to deal with students who refuse to do their assignments. All this has raised questions about homework's effectiveness as an education tool.



How Does Homework Measure Up?

Sandra Hofferth of the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan conducted a survey of 2,394 households, including about 3,600 children, to see what activities children ages 3 to 11 spend their time on. Here's what she found.

	Age Group	1981	1997
Minutes spent on studying each week	3 to 5	12	36
	6 to 8	44	123
	9 to 11	169	217
Minutes spent on organized sports each week	3 to 5	31	176
	6 to 8	180	278
	9 to 11	189	314
Minutes spent on watching TV each week	3 to 5	799	808
	6 to 8	767	758
	9 to 11	1100	816

Source: Institute of Social Research, University of Michigan, 734/763-5166. On the Web, under "Child Development Supplement, What's New," at www.umich.edu/~psid.

Compiled by Andrea Shaffer

Who's saying homework doesn't work?

Few would claim that homework doesn't produce results in an ideal world. But some researchers are arguing that in today's reality, homework is doing some students more harm than good.

Etta Kralovec, director of educational studies at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, surveyed high school dropouts in the early 1990s. All respondents cited their inability to keep up with homework assignments as a key in their decision to drop out.

A number of factors contribute to student failure to complete homework. More students are holding down jobs. Many have family responsibilities, caring for siblings or other young relatives. And participation in extracurricular activities has boomed, creating yet another competitor for after-school time.

"I'm shocked that kids whine so much about homework," says Maria Garza-Lubeck, who teaches high school social studies in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Still, in some cases she's given up assigning homework to those students who "won't do it or, if it does get done, turn in poor quality." Many have legitimate excuses, she notes—"They might be working all night cleaning offices." The only time they can focus on schoolwork is when they're in the classroom. "I try to concentrate on that," she says.

So do American kids have to do too much homework?

U.S. students do spend more time on homework than in years past. But they also spend a lot more time on organized sports—and still spend the most time overall watching TV (see chart). So it'd be a stretch to blame homework as the sole exterminator of quality family time or a child's inner peace.

U.S. students may take solace in the fact that their counterparts in Japan and China spend significantly more time on homework—up to seven times as much time.

Then conventional wisdom says that homework is still a good thing?

"The research is quite clear," says Dr. Harris Cooper, professor of psychology at the University of Missouri-Columbia and the author of numerous papers and books on homework. "Homework does have a positive effect on achievement as children grow older."

A wide variety of studies report that students completing homework in middle and high school have an edge in class grades and test scores.

Maryland's Garza-Lubeck requires her social studies students to take notes on their reading for homework. It can be "maddening" to keep up with the homework that 150 students turn in, but she's found a big correlation between the quality of notes and eventual test grades.

Though evidence doesn't indicate a similar effect in the lower grades, University of Missouri researcher Cooper still believes that "all kids should have homework every day." Even the youngest child can learn to set up a schedule and develop study habits and time-management skills.

Overloading children with homework in the early grades can ruin motivation, Cooper acknowledges. He recommends 10 minutes each night for each grade. That can increase a little if assignments are mostly reading or parents have a strong educational bent.

How important is parent involvement?

Parents need to encourage independence in doing homework to help the child develop life-long learning skills, says Cooper. He cautions against over-involvement unless a child's experiencing academic difficulties. Then, parental homework help is a good way to extend the school day.

Perhaps a parent's most important contribution is "a positive attitude" toward homework, he says. Parents should "set the stage," giving kids the space and resources they need.

This positive attitude is more apt to develop when parents and teachers work as a team. Cooper advises teachers to communicate expectations—to explain reasons for certain assignments and to send a letter home when long-term projects are due.

In turn, he says, parents "have an obligation not to question teachers' assignments in front of their kids."

In 1987, the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University developed TIPS—Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork—for elementary and middle schools. TIPS activities, now used nationwide, don't require parents to teach skills. Instead, they ask students to talk to someone at home about what they're learning—perhaps explain a math concept to a parent or interview an adult about hairstyles of the past. There's even space for parents to note their reactions to the homework.

In surveys "parents were ecstatic," says center director Joyce Epstein. "They're happy to have a way to talk to their children. It's all about showing, sharing, and celebrating achievements."

Any suggestions for making homework work?

- Never use homework as a punishment, and don't give kids a homework pass for a job well done, says Cooper. Both actions imply that "homework is no fun"—a mixed message that can backfire on both student and teacher.
- Schools where students lack parental support after school shouldn't abandon homework. Adds Cooper: "Assignments should be short, simple, and of high-interest—the kind that kids can do on their own."
- "Schools need consistency," says Cooper. "You need to avoid a third grade where a child gets three hours of homework and a fourth grade where there's none."

For More Information

- E-mail Harris Cooper at CooperH@missouri.edu. or check out his book *The Battle over Homework: An Administrator's Guide to Setting Sound and Effective Policies* (Corwin Press).
- To find out more about the TIPS interactive homework program from Johns Hopkins University, visit the Web at www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/tips.htm or call 410/516-8808.

Good Stuff

What Parents Want
A Lot To Be Thankful For: What Parents Want Children To Learn about America, a study based on interviews with more than 800 parents nationwide, notes that 88 percent of parents polled believe that schools should make a special effort to teach new immigrants about American values—and 87 percent of immigrant parents polled agreed. The study also asked parents if public schools currently pay enough attention to diversity (55 percent said yes) and whether schools should focus on each student's pride in ethnic heritage (18 percent said yes). The full report is available for $10 from Public Agenda, 6 East 39th St., New York, NY 10016, 212/686-6610. Visit on the Web at www.publicagenda.org.

Classroom Crusades
In 80 pages, *Classroom Crusades* summarizes the range of attacks that public education is enduring today—from voucher initiatives to gay-bashing to creationism curriculum—and how educators can counter them. Free copies are available from the non-profit group Rethinking Schools, 1001 East Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212, 800/669-4192. Send E-mail to rethink@execpc.com or visit the Web at www.rethinkingschools.org.

Facts on Finance Reform
Finance Reform: Equity and Adequacy discusses historical and recent developments related to school finance. Information includes updates on court cases that are shaping education reform in various states, technical details of school finance, and discussions of student needs and outcomes. $32 plus $3.50 s&h from Educational Research Service, 2000 Clarendon Blvd., Arlington, VA 22201, 800/791-9308.

Character Cultivators
Cultivating Character provides a series of simple resources for parents and educators interested in working together to train young people to become good citizens—reproducible handouts, sample letters, and year-long goals for parent-educator teams. 32 pp., $10.95 for each grade in the series (7-12), from Resource Publications, 160 E. Virginia St., Suite 290, San Jose, CA 95112, 408/286-8505.

You know you have a problem when . . .

"You get a message to call a parent back, and it's marked 'Urgent.'"

Tanya Schotten, K-5 art teacher, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Dilemma

When the News Isn't Good

How do you give parents bad news about their children?

There are several ways to do this. One is to have the child present at a conference. Turn to the student and say directly, "Tell your father what you did on the bus yesterday afternoon."

Students will be remarkably honest and forthcoming. I like this method because I haven't had to accuse the child. I've just facilitated a place where the parent can be informed.

Often, especially for a first offense, I ask the child to take an index card and write down exactly what happened. I inspect the card, have the child sign and date it, and I sign and date it.

I keep these cards on file. They're particularly helpful when a parent is called in because of repeated bad behavior and states, "Johnny has never done anything like this before."

Gloria Lawrence
Sixth grade teacher
Mount Airy, North Carolina

I have students call their parents from the classroom and tell the parents what they did.

Jacquelyn Streetman
Resource specialist
Studio City, California

As a speech and language pathologist in an early childhood center, I'm often the first one who must deliver "the news," since language and speech disorders have a significant impact on a child's learning.

It's imperative to be positive, offer practical solutions, and provide information—both oral and written.

Parents also need to know that there are many other youngsters with similar disorders, and they are not alone.

Since the initial meeting can be overwhelming, I encourage parents to call or write if they have questions afterward.

Communication and empowerment are the key issues here. Also, a little humor and a big box of tissues can go a long way.

Helaine Rosenfield
Speech and language pathologist
Abington, Massachusetts

Ted Pitts

Here's an easy rule of thumb to remember:

- F—Facts. Give facts to parents, after the details have been checked out. It's best to do so face to face.
- A—Accuracy is key when delivering news that may engage a parent's defense mechanisms.
- C—Clarity and caring are essential to helping parents understand the news. Maintaining eye contact in a private setting is recommended.
- T—Timeliness is important, so parents can react soon after the event occurred.
- S—Start with a positive message about their child and end the conference with a plan of action, referral, or some ray of hope.

Peggy Hanselman
High school counselor
New Hope, Pennsylvania

A wise colleague first told me about the power of "and." I stored the advice in a mental corner. Then, during a difficult conference, the word found its way into my discourse.

"Rachel has shown a true effort to bring her materials to class every day, *and* we need to work next on meeting deadlines for long-range projects."

These words create a warm, supportive tone. Try using "and" in place of the "but" that is eager to escape your lips. Since the day I switched, I've been pleased with the climate the change creates and the results it has garnered.

Dianna Craft
Sixth grade reading and language arts teacher
Flemington, New Jersey

Got an Answer?

How do you invigorate a lackluster community or business partnership?
Send your answer by regular mail, Fax 202/822-7206, or E-mail at dilemma2@neatoday.nea.org. Please include your job title and grade level.

Published respondents will receive a bright new *NEA Today* mug!

Communities

You know you've been successful when . . .

"One of your students says, 'I taught my little sister how to subtract this weekend.'"

Sharon Rasmussen, second grade teacher, Sheridan, Wyoming

Delight

Empower Parents as Partners

Alabama parents who struggled through school now help their own children succeed.

Linda Garrett, proctor for community education relations at Alabama State University, believes that while it may take a community to raise a child, "parents are the number one teachers."

When those parents harbor negative memories of school themselves, engaging them as partners in their children's education is that much more challenging.

But through her Parent Empowerment Program in Montgomery, Garrett is convincing parents that they are the key to keeping their at-risk children from failing in school or dropping out altogether.

Many of the more than 100 parents participating "haven't completed their own education and have had negative school experiences," Garrett notes. "I'm trying to give them a new appreciation for education—and the confidence and knowledge to equip their children with skills to help them not only in school, but in life."

Garrett's program, based on Dorothy Rich's MegaSkills, conducts continuous workshops for parents on how to help children make good choices, go the extra mile, use common sense, and not quit.

Parents also learn what it takes to increase a child's confidence, motivation, and level of compassion.

The importance of effort is not lost on parents when Garrett compliments them for faithfully attending the workshops despite busy schedules.

In return, she's seen "tremendous growth and enthusiasm among parents."

"Parents will tell me that they see improvement in their children," says Garrett, "and that they're more conscious about what they say to them and how they say it."

Thanks to the parent program, Montgomery's dropout prevention programs are reporting growing self-confidence and more positive behavior among students.

Academic performance, too, has blossomed, largely because Garrett infuses the program with the belief that "it's not enough to have these children tutored after school. Parents need to reinforce at home what children learn in school."

At New Challenge—an alternative school that requires parents to actively participate in Garrett's program—student achievement is up, attendance has increased by 10 percent, and parent involvement has grown by 30 percent over the past three years.

Garrett hasn't lost sight of the fact that improving parent-teacher partnerships takes work on both sides. To that end, she'd like to see schools become more accessible to all parents.

"When we look at the hours we operate, they're not parent-friendly," says Garrett. "If a parent needs to see a teacher at 5 p.m, the school system's policies need to be flexible to allow teachers to adjust their hours to accommodate."

Garrett is seeking to improve partnerships with parents by doing "whatever it takes to reach out to them—whether it's calling, sending home letters or fliers, or visiting at home or in their community."

The community has supported the parent program—local organizations and businesses have joined forces to create a daily homework advice show on cable TV, for example.

Even here, the emphasis remains on what can be done in the home.

"If children learn responsibility at home," says Garrett, "they will use that skill in school and later in life. The same is true for taking initiative, persevering, caring, being a team player, and making sound decisions."

For More Information

Contact Garrett at 334/229-6866 or send E-mail to lgahmed@aol.com.

Andy Hall's

NEA member Linda Garrett (right) convinces dozens of parents—many of whom had a tough time in school themselves—that they hold the key to their children's success.

Idea Exchange

Family Bookbag Projects

At my elementary school, we promote parental involvement through a bookbag project.

Each classroom has a bookbag with a different theme—bears, colors, fish. Inside each bookbag is a book, cassette tape and player, video, marker, scissors, and other supplies. Students take turns keeping the bookbag for one to two weeks, after which they bring it back in along with a project they completed with their parents—posters, mobiles, floats.

My kindergarten students love taking our red bear bookbag home and ask each week whose turn it is. And so far, no parent has objected to having to do the project.

Rhonda Price
Liberty, Kentucky

Lost Loved Ones

Our school community has suffered many losses of close friends, former staff members, and family during the past year. I've talked with my fifth graders about their feelings as holidays and important family dates approach, feelings we have when some of our dear ones are no longer with us for these events.

The memories we have of those who are gone are a precious gift. As a means of honoring these memories, I wrapped a large box in white paper and placed a big bow on it. We placed the box in the main hall and invited staff and students to sign the name of a loved one they have lost. We've also shared memories of the person while inscribing the name.

Students of all ages have signed the box. It's provided an additional means of healing for us and drawn us closer together.

Marlys Moore
Winona, Minnesota

ShareYour Ideas

You can pass along your tips to *NEA Today*'s more than 2.4 million readers in one of five ways:

- By mail: *NEA Today*, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036
- By phone: 202/822-7201
- By fax: 202/822-7206
- By E-mail: Ideas@neatoday.nea.org
- Through the Web: www.nea.org/neatoday

Health

From the Network

The NEA Health Information Network suggests the following helpful resources.

Blood on the Job

The Red Book. Exposure to Blood on the Job: What School Employees Need To Know, a new booklet from the NEA Health Information Network, provides educators with information on handling blood, prevention of exposure to HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C, and where to go for additional resources. Also available is a poster to put up in your school to remind staff to practice universal precautions. To order free copies, contact NEA HIN at 800/718-8387 or visit the Web at www.nea.org/hin.

Awards from the Network

The Vivian Roy Bowser Cancer Education Award and the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Education Award recognize outstanding individuals working to educate others in these fields. The NEA Health Information Network is now accepting nominations for these awards, to be presented at the NEA Representative Assembly in July. For award criteria and applications, call 800/718-8387 or visit the Web at www.nea.org/hin.

Grants Available

In 1994, NEA and the Texas State Teachers Association established a national endowment to honor Vivian Roy Bowser, an NEA member whose courageous struggle with breast cancer brought the disease to the attention of NEA members and staff. Through this fund, small grants are available for local cancer education programs benefitting NEA members. In addition, scholarships are available to NEA members enrolled in the National Breast Cancer Coalition's Project LEAD Course. For a grant application or information on Project LEAD Course, contact the NEA Health Information Network at 800/718-8387 or visit the Web at www.nea.org/hin.

Toll-Free Information

Need quick access to health resources? The National Health Information Center has posted a listing of toll-free information numbers for more than 200 health issues—including learning disorders —on the Web at http://nhic-nt. health.org/.

Does Ritalin Really Add Up?

More than four million schoolchildren take the prescription drug Ritalin to combat attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Dr. Lawrence Diller, a behavioral pediatrician and author of Running on Ritalin: A Physician Reflects on Children, Society, and Performance in a Pill *(Bantam) discussed the ethics and effectiveness of such widespread Ritalin use with Robert Jardin of the NEA Health Information Network.*

What is attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder—and how common is it?

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder—informally known as ADD—defies a concrete definition. There are no blood tests, brain scans, or psychological tests that definitively diagnose it.

For practical purposes, a person struggling with performance or behavior problems that include high degrees of inattention, impulsivity, or hyperactivity may be said to have ADD.

Because there are no specific markers for ADD, estimates of its prevalence in the United States vary widely, from 1 to 20 percent.

How is ADD diagnosed?

Evaluating for ADD includes assessing a child's personality, intelligence profile, learning skills, emotional status, and family dynamics, to name a few.

Ultimately, the ADD diagnosis is an opinion. Some doctors diagnose ADD in virtually every child they evaluate as a way of codifying certain behavioral tendencies. Other doctors don't even believe that ADD exists.

Educators should be aware of their own biases and those of parents and doctors. For example, studies have shown that when special education teachers and general education teachers observe the same children, special ed teachers rate the students as having less intense or frequent problems with attention, impulsivity, or hyperactivity.

How does Ritalin work—and is it "the" answer?

Ritalin—the trade name for methylphenidate—is a stimulant, and it helps people focus on tasks they find difficult or boring.

A major misconception about Ritalin is that it has a paradoxical effect, calming children rather than stimulating them. This misleads parents into believing that somehow their children's brains are different from those of "normal" children. In fact, the effects of low-dose stimulants, including Ritalin, are the same on children and adults, ADD or not.

But the fact that Ritalin works for ADD children does not mean that it can be considered the moral equivalent to or replacement for better parenting and schools for American children.

The best that can be said for Ritalin is that it offers symptomatic relief that may help both children and caregivers cope more effectively.

Do you prescribe Ritalin?

My role as a physician is to ease suffering. After evaluation of family and school factors, I will prescribe Ritalin to allow "round and octagonal" children to fit more easily into those square educational holes.

But my role as a citizen pushes me to alert others about the huge increase in Ritalin use in our country. Otherwise, I'd be silently "complicitous" with values and forces I believe are harmful to children and families.

Educators likewise have a duty to help a child seek a medical evaluation for ADD and Ritalin, if they think that will help. But, at the same time, they should alert families to others factors that we must all work toward changing.

What would be an ideal learning environment for ADD students?

The most successful programs have been those where the children spend time in a specialized, highly structured classroom.

Also, classrooms should be geared toward close monitoring, with more immediate and tangible rewards and consequences for behavior.

Two researchers, have developed special classrooms where behavioral techniques, such as token contingency awards, are as successful as Ritalin in improving children's performance and behavior.

But they also found that unless the regular teacher adopted some of these techniques during the ADD student's transition period back into the mainstream classroom, the gains the child made were quickly lost.

Resources

- CHADD (Children with Attention Deficit Disorders) sponsors support groups and publishes two newsletters on attention disorders for parents and professionals. For more information, contact the organization at 8181 Professional Pl., Suite 201, Landover, MD 20785, 301/306-7070. Or visit the Web at www.chadd.org.
- The National Mental Health Association provides a variety of free materials on mental health, including a fact sheet on attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. For a list of materials, contact the NMHA at 1021 Prince St, Alexandria, VA 33314, 800/969-6642, TTY 800/433-5959. Or visit the Web at www.nmha.org.
- The National Association of School Psychologists offers free information on promoting educationally and psychologically healthy environments for all students, including those suffering from ADD. Contact NASP at 4340 East West Hwy., Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814, 301/657-0270. Or visit the Web at www.naspweb.org/.

Rights Watch

Beware Charter Plights

Though the jury's still out, early signs show that charter schools can be bad news for employee rights.

Thirty-five states now have charter school laws on the books, and around 1,000 charter schools are up and running.

While the charter school movement is growing in popularity, school employees should know what they're getting into before they leave their public school jobs to work in a charter. That's because, in many states, charter employees forfeit their right to bargain. And, in almost all states, they lose their right to tenure and due process.

They become what lawyers call "employees at will," who can be fired at any time for any reason.

But that's the whole point, as many charter school supporters candidly admit. The pro-voucher Center for Education Reform ranks the various charter school laws and gives its highest marks to states where charter employees have no employment rights and the charter school has "complete control over personnel decisions."

After all, they argue, nonunion laborers will work for less money, and union work rules hamper educational innovation.

California is a case in point. In one of the first cases to consider whether charter school employees are covered by the state's bargaining law, a court decided in 1996 that the answer is no.

The Charter Schools Act, the California trial court noted, makes charter schools "exempt from the laws governing school districts," and that includes the state bargaining law.

In a revealing decision, the court explained that recognizing employee bargaining rights would inflict "irreparable harm" on the charter school and destroy its "innovation, flexibility, and creativity." The court added that, by contracting out maintenance services, the charter school involved saved $25,000, money that was "returned to the classrooms in the form of lower class size."

In California, as in most states, charter schools can, if they choose, recognize and bargain with employee unions. And many California schools that have converted from traditional public schools to charter school status have done so.

The news about how charter schools could affect tenure rights and due process is even worse. In the vast majority of states, charter schools are exempt from state tenure or continuing contract laws. This means that these schools can fire or nonrenew teachers without having "just cause" or some other legitimate reason related to job performance or conduct.

Moreover, because the schools don't have to prove "just cause," the terminated teacher isn't entitled to any due process at all: no notice of the charges and no hearing to contest them.

A handful of state laws, however, permit public school employees to take a "leave of absence" to work in a charter school, with certain re-employment rights if they return to the public school within three to five years.

The push to disable employee unions and to eliminate employee rights in charter schools is driven, in some cases, by a profit motive. A number of states permit for-profit companies to create and manage charter schools. By banning collective bargaining, these companies can hold down labor costs and increase profits.

The same is true with those pesky employment rights. It's a lot cheaper to fire an "employee at will" than a teacher with job security. By denying tenure and due process, charter schools can maximize the bottom line.

But at what cost? Gordon Gecko's mantra "greed is good" may work on Wall Street, but it's a lousy outlook for running a school.

Consider Arizona, where, according to an expose in *U.S. News and World Report*, for-profit charter schools are running amok. In that state, high school students have to attend school only four hours a day. In the true spirit of entrepreneurship, several private companies have opened charter schools that run two or three four-hour sessions per day, tripling their enrollment. To further increase their profits, they've also replaced teachers with self-paced computer instruction.

One Arizona charter school had no school building, so it held classes in a park. Another charter treats its teachers like day laborers, paying them $9 per hour with no benefits or overtime. (They can get away with this because charter school teachers in Arizona don't have to be college graduates, much less certified teachers.)

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development last fall also published a study critical of for-profit charter schools. The authors studied 11 such schools in the suburbs of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and found that 10 of them cut costs by refusing to provide transportation for their students.

That refusal created a sort of socioeconomic segregation: Because poor families couldn't afford to transport their children to the charter schools, the student bodies tended to be overwhelmingly white and middle class.

The authors also concluded that special education "is an area of profit for these management groups." They found that in 10 of the 11 for-profit schools, special ed students constituted only 3 percent of the student population—as opposed to 10 to 13 percent in regular public schools—and that many of these students received only "minimal services."

Charter school laws vary dramatically from state to state, and not all of them abrogate employee rights. In fact, most charter schools can, if they choose, provide for bargaining and tenure rights in their charters.

But the message is clear: Before agreeing to work in a charter school, employees should check the state charter law and review the school's charter to determine what rights—if any—they will have in the new school.

—Michael D. Simpson
NEA Office of General Counsel

Charter Schools: Backdoor to Vouchers?

Chicago priest Rev. Michael Pfleger wants to convert his Catholic school into a publicly funded charter school.

Chicago public schools chief Paul Vallas's response: "We've got every other private organization running charter schools—why not the archdiocese?"

The scheme would be a real boon to St. Sabina, the parish school located on Chicago's South Side. While tuition is now $2,435, the school would receive $4,700 per pupil in public money if it became a charter school.

Illinois charter school law prohibits private school conversions, so the school would have to close down and reopen as a nonprofit. And religious instruction would have to be voluntary, before or after school.

When New York passed a charter school law last December, church leaders in New York City quickly began floating their own version of the Chicago approach.

The Rev. Floyd H. Flake, head of an African Methodist Episcopal church, has said that a charter school could help handle the overflow from his Allen Christian School. He would avoid church-state problems by offering religious instruction after school.

And, in Texas, the Fellowship Baptist Church of Oak Cliff is helping to fund a charter school to be built on church property. The Fellowship Educational Learning Center has already obtained its charter and will open this fall.

The Rev. Armond W. Brown, the pastor, says the new school will be located "in close proximity to the church and its members, and we wanted to serve the members."

Adds his wife, Paula Brown, who serves on the school's governing board: "We're real excited because we get a chance to set our own standards. We are truly looking for private school standards at a public school cost."

Church sponsorship of charter schools greatly concerns Steven Green of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

"We have some real fears," notes Green, "that this is getting publicly funded religious education through the backdoor."

—M.D.S.

Bits & Bytes

Bytes for Beginners

My friend told me that although my computer is on almost all the time, I don't need a screen saver. Is this true? I have a 17-inch color monitor that I just paid a lot of money for, and I want to make sure it lasts!

Your friend is correct. Screen savers don't make any substantial difference in preserving your monitor, especially with modern displays connected to computers running either Apple or Microsoft operating system software.

Today's monitors don't suffer from screen burn-in—as did older, monochrome models running DOS. An older screen's layout was "fixed," and text always came up in the same position and eventually burned impressions into the screen's phosphor.

Burn-in isn't the issue, however. By not turning your monitor off at night, you're considerably reducing its life. The heat generated by a monitor tends to dry out important parts under the hood.

You're also wasting electricity and money. A typical monitor sucks up between 60 and 200 watts of power. At about $.10 per KWH electric rate, you're spending between $48 and $160 a year to keep that monitor glowing.

If you must leave your computer on for an extended period of time but don't want to shorten the life of your monitor, consider enabling the "energy saver" or "sleeper" controls that are part of your computer's operating system (OS) software.

Most computers and monitors built after 1996 support these energy-efficient controls in an effort to conform to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star Program.

Your OS manual should tell you how to activate these controls. To learn more about the Energy Star Program, go to www.epa.gov/energystar.html.

Have ideas, comments, or questions about technology? You can E-mail webeditor@dear.nea.org or write to Dear Webeditor, NEA Center for Education Technology, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Check out www.nea.org/cet for more questions from beginners and answers from the experts.

My favorite Web site . . .

"The K-12 Connection (www.k12connection.org) lets me work with other teachers from all over the world to construct projects and lesson plans. This site is a must-see!"

Jan Updike, second grade teacher, Indianapolis, Indiana

Wired Classroom

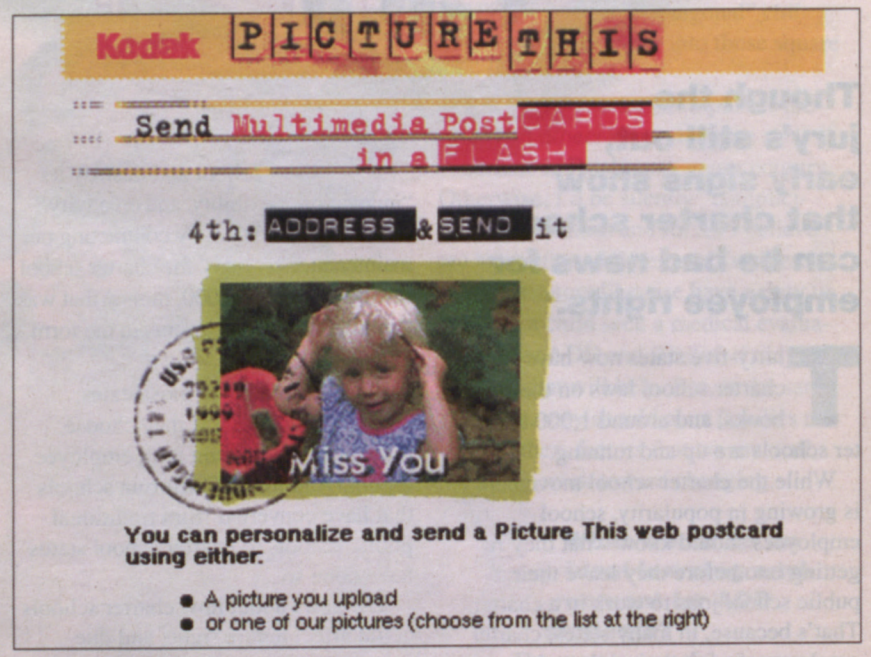
Wish You Were Here

In Mississippi all eighth graders are taking a class called Computer Discovery, and many have E-mail accounts. This gives me the chance to assign extra credit and to provide a worthwhile learning experience for my English classes.

Some of the E-mail assignments I like to use are:

- Character Postcards. Students go to a greeting card Web site, such as www.kodak.com/digitalImaging/pictureThis/picThisHome.jhtml, and create a postcard from the point of view of one of the characters in the stories we have read so far this year. Students must ask themselves what pictures that character would choose and what message that character would send. When students finish designing the character's postcard, they send it to me via E-mail.
- Vocabulary Puzzles. Students go to www.puzzlemaker.com to make a puzzle from their vocabulary words. They print out an original and an answer key, and they send an E-mail telling me about their puzzle.

Tess Talley
English teacher
Biloxi, Mississippi


Kodak PICTURE THIS
Send Multimedia PostCARDS in a FLASH
4th: ADDRESS & SEND it
Miss You
You can personalize and send a Picture This web postcard using either:
A picture you upload
or one of our pictures (choose from the list at the right)

Phys Ed on the Web

The physical education department staff at Park View Middle School has designed a Web site so that parents and students can see what we're doing.

The site contains student work, such as poems students have written about physical activity, as well as plenty of photos of students participating in various activities. We update the site weekly to include the top runners and their times, happenings in phys ed, lesson ideas, and plenty of links to health and physical activity sites.

What we've done on this site can be applied to any subject to motivate students with technology. Check us out at http://members.aol.com/pvmspe/index.html.

Sheila Huggins
Physical education teacher
Yucaipa, California

Science Resources Site

I have amassed an encyclopedic Web site full of links to great science sites, including three Web pages full of research links for students and teachers. The site includes a large resource page and my own Monarch butterfly life cycle tutorial—with digital images captured in my classroom.

I now have about 70 internal html files integrated into the site, and well over 1,000 links I work hard to keep updated. Take a look at http://home.unicom.net/~warnerr/.

Randall Warner
Junior high science teacher
Olathe, Kansas

Cool Use for Screen Savers

I use the Windows scrolling screen saver to display special directions, technology tips, or anything the students might need to know for the day. When they enter the classroom, they just have to look at the screen.

For example, if there's a test scheduled, I use the screen saver to remind students to study their notes and get their pencils sharpened while I take roll.

Or, I might put a technology fact on the screen so the students have something to learn the first couple minutes of class. I later ask questions about the fact for bonus points.

David Ball
Technology teacher
Mount Hope, West Virginia

Video Book Reviews

My students submit their book reports as videotaped book reviews. They must "sell" their most recent library selection to all my classes via video.

Students make their presentations in front of a backdrop that resembles a television news set. We then play back each class's book reviews for the other classes.

This is a great way to give students a chance to openly express themselves in front of an audience. Students tell me that they get good "public speaking" experience—without having to be in front of an extremely large group.

Some of my colleagues have edited my tapes to use on our school's closed-circuit television system during the morning announcements.

David Hachey
Sixth grade language arts/literature teacher
Indianapolis, Indiana

My favorite software . . .

"NFL Reading (Theatrix, 800/795-8749, $29.99). Students ask to come in *after* school just to play this game! Without realizing it, they're enhancing their reading skills."

Frank Verducci, computer teacher, Roselle Park, New Jersey

Friendly User

Portable Writing Tool

Want writing results? Put technology in kids' hands—and backpacks.

Who:
Cheryl Perkins, third grade teacher, Charles W. McCrary Elementary School, Asheboro, North Carolina

E-mail:
cperkins@asheboro.k12.nc.us

Inspiration:
When Perkins found out last year that, thanks to a federal grant, every third grader in Asheboro city schools would have access to an AlphaSmart 2000 word processor, she was skeptical. Would students be able to do more with these simple machines than practice keyboarding skills?

Happily, yes. "It's been like putting a computer in every child's hands," Perkins says. "The AlphaSmarts integrate well with all subjects and really motivate the students."

This year, all 800 third and fourth graders have one of the $200 pint-size word processors to use at home and school.

Students now type in everything from book reports to multiplication tables. They can print their work out directly or hook their AlphaSmarts to the classroom computer and integrate their files with its software programs.

AlphaSmarts are built of durable bicycle helmet material—strong enough to be drop-kicked, although none of the students has tried. On the contrary, Perkins says, "Students are very appreciative and protective of them—and excited that they can take them home."

Issuing an AlphaSmart to every student "doesn't put anyone at a disadvantage," Perkins says. "The use of technology is growing, and all children need to become technology-literate."

Lesson:
In Perkins' classroom, the AlphaSmarts are handed out first thing in the morning—if they haven't been taken home the night before.

Because students can type and edit their work in advance—and save up to eight files—they have time to learn how to add more sophisticated layers of technology. They can embark on projects that were previously limited by the relationship of, say, 24 children to one classroom computer.

"I use more multimedia programs now than I ever have," says Kathy Malpass, a third grade teacher at Lindley Park Elementary School.

Students can read a book and then have a "silent debate," by typing in reactions to the reading. Results are printed out and posted. Observations made when conducting science experiments can be simultaneously typed into the AlphaSmarts.

Perkins' students toted AlphaSmarts to the zoo and typed in comments, then took pictures with a digital camera. Back in the classroom, they downloaded their text and photos into the computer and produced a slide show on their trip.

The bottom line: Having their own word processors gets students to write more. "And if they can put into words what they're doing, they understand it," Perkins says.

Angie Haywood, a third grade teacher at Guy B. Teachey Elementary School, agrees.

"I used to hear a lot of, 'How much do we have to write?'" she says. With only four lines of text displayed at a time on AlphaSmarts, "kids can't tell how much they're writing, so they write until their ideas are complete."

Kristin Prelipp

North Carolina teacher Cheryl Perkins predicts a notable boost in writing and reading skills now that students have portable word processors to use at home and school.

Click:
"By having students more involved, more on task, more motivated, they're more successful—and I can cover more material," Perkins says.

"The students feel like writers," Malpass adds. "They have a sense of ownership with their writing as well as with having a machine."

For More Information

Visit Asheboro city schools on the Web at www.asheboro.k12.nc.us. To learn more about the AlphaSmart 2000 word processor, go to www.alphasmart.com.

New & Noteworthy

Weekly Technology Tip
Etoolsweekly is a free electronic mailing list from NEA that gives you a new tip on using technology in the classroom each week.

To join, go to www.nea.org/cet/wired/index.html, scroll to the end of the page, and enter your E-mail address.

French Grammar
The University of Texas at Austin offers a series of interactive first-year French grammar exercises at www.lamc.utexas.edu/fr/home.html.

Women's Biographies
More than 100 biographies of notable women mathematicians are available at www.scottlan.edu/Lriddle/women/women.htm. You'll find photos of some of these prominent figures as well.

Math Software
Math FactMaster is new software for grades one through six that takes students through practice sessions and identifies gaps in knowledge. After each session, the software prescribes the appropriate practice for the student.

Educators can customize the presentation sessions, change passwords, and change program controls for individual students. $27.95 from Curriculum Associates, 800/225-0248.

Smart Surfing
Evaluating Internet Sites is a Web page that teaches students how to look at Internet sites objectively before deciding on their credibility. The page can be found at http://cii.vcsu.nodak.edu/classroom/evaluating.htm.

Talk to Us

Have a nifty classroom tip or lesson plan that uses technology? E-mail a description (under 200 words, please!) to **wiredclassroom@list.nea.org**.

Is there a Web site, CD-ROM, or piece of software you can't live without? E-mail your favorites—and why you love them—to **myfavoritetech@list.nea.org**.

Or send your responses by regular mail to *NEA Today*, or by Fax to 202/822-7206, or through the Web at www.nea.org/cet.

Those published here will receive a sparkling *NEA Today* mug!

So your niece is going to be a teacher . . .

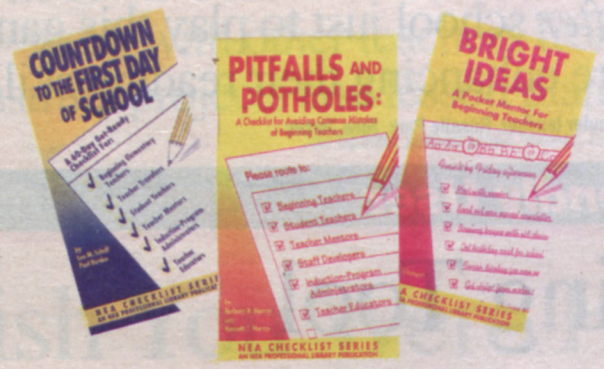
Or maybe it's your nephew — or even your son or daughter — who'll be graduating this spring and starting a brand-new teaching career in the fall.

You were just starting out once. Remember those first-day jitters? That empty feeling when you faced situation after situation you never expected?

Want to help your favorite new teacher get off to a less stressful start?

Try giving a graduation gift that will give your new teacher the confidence that's the key to classroom success. The NEA Professional Library's *Graduation Gift Pack* may be just what your new teacher needs.

The Graduation Gift Pack features three great handbooks for teaching rookies, each one full of classroom-tested tips from veterans who know what works — and what doesn't.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BRIGHT IDEAS
A Pocket Mentor For Beginning Teachers
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The second, *Pitfalls and Potholes: A Checklist for Avoiding Common Mistakes of Beginning Teachers*, offers a series of sensible strategies you'll never read in any textbook.

And in the third book, *Bright Ideas: A Pocket Mentor for Beginning Teachers*, you'll find the sort of usable advice that every teacher needs and few teachers get.

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To order, or for more information, call 800-229-4200 Mon. – Fri., 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. ET

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Heads Up!

TV Tips

Fresco: A Story of Art, Community, and Excellence

PBS, April 1, check local listings. This one-hour program documents the creation of an enormous ceiling fresco depicting the seven virtues: faith, hope, charity, justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude. An activity and resource guide as well as an education outreach newsletter are available. Send E-mail to dbartemis@aol.com

Outward Bound

Discovery Channel, Saturdays, premiering April 3, 10-10:30 a.m. ET. This new Discovery Kids series follows eight teens on a wilderness challenge. The teens must develop strong teamwork skills to overcome deserts, mountains, and rivers. For more information, call up www.discovery.com.

Sci Squad

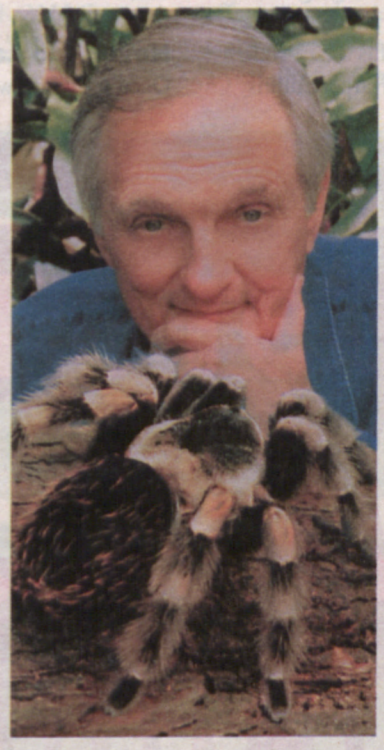
Discovery Channel, Saturdays, premiering April 3, 9:30-10 a.m. ET. Another new Discovery Kids series, this program follows a group of kid detectives who solve science problems. The cases include the physics of hockey, gravity on roller coasters, and hurricane prediction. For details, go to www.discovery.com.

The Merrow Report: Growing Up in the City

PBS, Fridays, April 9-23, 10-11 p.m. ET, check local listings. This documentary series profiles a group of middle schoolers in Manhattan's Upper West Side, observing and recording the specific challenges and obstacles that confront today's urban youth. Transcripts, resource guides, and videos are available at www.pbs.org/merrow.

A&E Classroom: Ernest Hemingway

A&E, Monday-Tuesday, April 12-13, 7-8 a.m. ET. Mariel Hemingway narrates this documentary about the influential writings, explosive personality, and controversial life of her grandfather. For an online study guide, check the Web at www.AandE.com or see the spring issue of A&E's *Idea Book for Educators*, which is also available on the Web site. For home video availability, call 800/423-1212.



The Century: America's Time

The History Channel, Monday-Friday, 9-10 p.m. ET, premiering April 12. The History Channel has picked up Peter Jennings's documentary on the major personalities, movements, and wars of the 20th century. Expanded to 15 parts. Support materials include a video collection, an educational outreach program, and companion book. Study guides are available at www.HistoryChannel.com.

Scientific American Frontiers: Spiders!

PBS, Wednesday, April 14, 8-9 p.m. ET, check local listings. Alan Alda hosts this exploration of arachnids from the rain forest to cyberspace, including a look at arachnophobia, the common fear of spiders. For free classroom guides, call 800/315-5010 or visit the Web at www.pbs.org/saf.

Great Composers

PBS, Wednesdays, April 14, 21, 28, 9-11 p.m. ET, check local listings. Narrated by Kenneth Branagh, this series profiles Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, and Puccini, exploring each composer's personality, career, and legacy. Resources and home video information can be found at www.pbs.org/composers.

Bravo in the Classroom

Bravo, Tuesday-Thursday, 6-7 a.m. ET. Designed to enhance arts and humanities studies, these programs feature the performing and visual arts and include profiles of writers, musicians, and artists. Visit the Web at www.bravotv.com for program schedules and discussion questions or call Bravo at 516/396-4547.

Crashbox

HBO Family, Monday-Friday 4-4:30 p.m. ET. Each episode of this interactive game show features games that challenge grade-school kids on history, math, spelling, grammar, and culture. Visit www.hbo4kids.com for an online kids' club with information for parents and teachers.

Great Minds Think for Themselves

ABC, Saturdays 8:30-10 a.m. ET. Interspersed among ABC's regular Saturday programming, these 90-second spots feature Disney's animated Genie introducing young children to independent thinkers who shaped American history. The spots profile Sojourner Truth, Sequoyah, Susan B. Anthony, and John Muir. For details, see "One Saturday Morning" at www.abc.com.

Joan of Arc

CBS, Sunday, May 16 and Tuesday, May 18, check local listings. This prime-time miniseries is based on the life of the illiterate peasant girl who, guided by visions, led the French army against the English.

Justin Canning, CBS

KIDSNET is providing a print study guide as well as supplementary online study materials. Students with questions for Joan of Arc will have the opportunity to "chat" with the historical figure herself on the Web at www.cbsjoanofarc.com

KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., provides these listings. For additional listings and information on children's shows, check out the KIDSNET Web site at www.kidsnet.org.

school stories

Episodes of* School Stories*—produced by NEA and The Learning Channel to provide an insightful look inside America's classrooms—are now on videotape and available from the NEA Professional Library. Here are just a few of the titles in stock:

Struggle for Safety

See what teachers and other staff at a Long Beach, California, school do to keep the influence of local gangs out of their classroom. Learn about the safety initiatives being used and why these teachers have much hope for the future. Stock #7612-5-00-F, $19.95.

If Teachers Fail . . . Fix or Fire?

Teachers in Columbus, Ohio, are policing their own ranks with a program called Peer Assistance and Review. See how veteran teachers are helping some of their troubled peers work out problems or adjust to first-year difficulties. Stock #7615-X-00-F, $16.95.

Connecting With Kids

A visit with two veteran NEA members and award-winning teachers—both known for getting the best from their students. Watch them work magic in the classroom. Stock #7606-0-00-F, $19.95.

Putting Kids First

At Teachers Memorial Elementary School in Kinston, North Carolina, the staff will do anything for the kids and community—and it shows. Find out how they're utilizing unusual resources, bartering with business, and partnering with social service providers—all to help kids. Stock #7608-7-00-F, $19.95.

Second-Chance High

At Hamilton Terrace Learning Center in Shreveport, Louisiana, expelled students mix with dropouts, students with criminal records, even welfare recipients back in school to qualify for their checks. But at Hamilton, everyone is learning and succeeding. Stock #7611-7-00-F, $19.95.

To order any of the above titles, call the NEA Professional Library at 800/229-4200.

Heads Up

Free or Inexpensive

Pass the Poetry

Build on your elementary students' interest in poetry by using nursery rhymes, jump-rope jingles, and songs.

Pass the Poetry, Please! offers lots more suggestions for bringing children and poetry together. $13.95 plus $2.75 s&h. Contact HarperCollins Children's Books, 1000 Keystone Industrial Park, Scranton, PA 18512, 800/242-7737.

Never Too Late

Once a student with a reading problem reaches adolescence, patterns of avoidance, denial, and resistance may hinder classroom performance. But *Never Too Late to Read: Language Skills for the Adolescent with Dyslexia* offers tips, techniques, and strategies for turning the tables. $27.50 plus $3.50 s&h (MD residents, add 5 percent sales tax). Contact York Press, Inc., P.O. Box 504, Timonium, MD 21094, 800/962-2763. Fax: 410/560-6758.

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What Birds See

A Birds-eye View helps kids K-2 see what the world looks like from the sky. Comes small for kids or large for teachers' use. $19.95 for the large book, $20.95 for six copies of the small one, plus 8 percent of order for s&h. Contact Rand McNally at 800/678-7263. Fax: 800/934-3479. On the Web: www.k12online.com.

Revise, Revise, Revise

Looking for new ways to improve your students' writing or maybe even your own? *Deep Revision* can help. Filled with practical and interesting ways to revise both fiction and nonfiction, the book offers 196 exercises and examples to writers young and old. $14.95 plus $4 s&h. Contact Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 5 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003, 888/266-5789. On the Web: www.twc.org.

Good Parenting

Being the Parent YOU Want to Be demonstrates 12 universal communication skills that help put parents and teachers in charge of problem situations and enable them to establish positive relationships with students. $19.95 plus $6.25 s&h. Contact Performance Learning Systems Bookstore, 224 Church St., Nevada City, CA 95959, 800/506-9996. Fax: 530/265-8629. On the Web: www.pls-bookstore.com.

Role Models

Searching for positive role models for kids in grades 4-6? *People of Purpose: 80 People Who Have Made a Difference* contains brief biographies on figures who have made a difference in

Heads Up

our world. Includes activities in reading and social studies. $12.95 plus 8 percent s&h. Contact Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers at 800/447-2226. Fax: 800/333-3328.

Lost in Translation

A 57-minute video, the Merrow Report's *Lost in Translation: Latinos, Schools and Society* reports on bilingual, immersion, and dual language approaches to teaching students in areas with large Latino populations. $19.95 plus $3.50 s&h. Contact Learning Matters, Inc., 6 East 32nd St., 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, 877/263-7769. Fax: 212/725-2433. On the Web: www.pbs.org/merrow. E-mail: merrow@pbs.org.

School Reform

Comprehensive School Reform: Making Good Choices is a guide for public schools and districts interested in implementing effective, comprehensive change. Sponsored by the North Central Regional Education Laboratory, the book includes a self-evaluation tool, a profiling tool, resources, and more. Download a free copy off the Web at www.ncrel.org/csri/.

Roots and Branches

Roots and Branches, a resource book about Native American literature, offers lesson plans and bibliographies to teachers of students in grades 7-12. $25.95 plus $2 s&h. Membership discounts available. Contact the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801, 800/369-6283.

William Carlos Williams

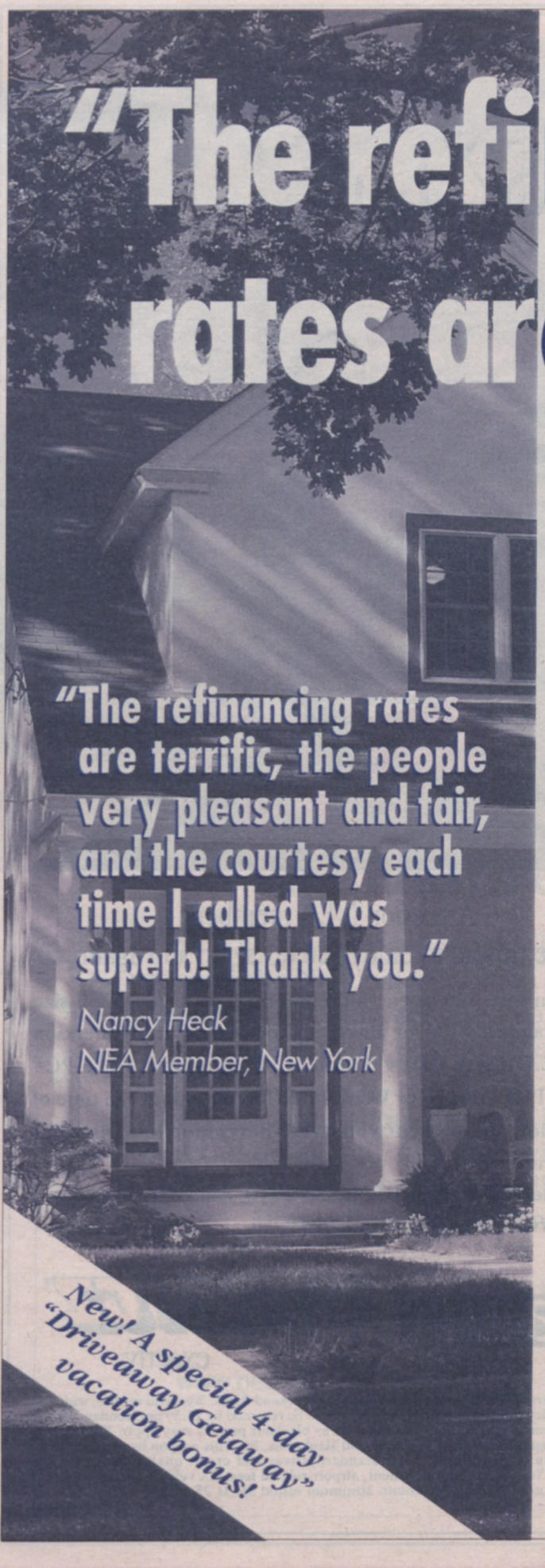
For poetry teachers of all ages, *The Teachers & Writers Guide to William Carlos Williams* includes 17 essays on using the poet's work to inspire writing. $14.95 plus $4 s&h. Contact Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 5 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003, 888/266-5789. On the Web: www.twc.org.

Kids' Lit

Four times a year, the *Riverbank Review* reviews children's books and includes articles and essays on children's literature, from preschool to young adult. $20 for a one-year subscription. Contact Riverbank Review, CHC-131, 2115 Summit Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105, 651/962-5372.

Poverty's Causes

WHY magazine addresses the root causes of hunger and poverty and offers ways that teachers can help kids make a difference. $18 for four issues a year. Profits from magazine sales go to several programs that fight hunger. Contact WHY, 505 Eighth Ave., 21st floor, New York, NY 10018-6582, 800/548-6479.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*This offer is valid on loan applications made between January 1, 1999 and December 31, 1999, and loans must close by December 31, 1999. Call 1-800-632-4968 for Vacation package details and terms and conditions. This offer is not available on home equity loans and lines of credit. Information is accurate as of date of printing and is subject to change without notice.

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Events

Poetry Week

Young People's Poetry Week—a new annual event sponsored by the Children's Book Council—will be celebrated April 12-18 with poetry readings in libraries and classrooms around the country.

To help librarians and educators observe poetry week, the Council is offering a classroom poetry kit, bookmarks, and a poster through its Web site, www.cbcbooks.org.

Exercise Day

Shape up simultaneously with millions of children. On May 5, 1999, Project ACES—All Children Exercise Simultaneously—will be celebrating its 11th annual exercise day. Join them and other schools at 10 a.m. for an exercise break. For more information or to sign up your school, check out the Web: www.projectaces.com.

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Contests

Web Building

Got a school Web site that deserves applause? SchoolLife.net is sponsoring a community Web building contest that will award new Gateway computers to participating schools every month through June.

School Web site submissions are due at the end of each month and will be evaluated on creativity in presentation, use of the tools, originality in design, themes, content, and value of the site to the school and community.

For a list of the categories and complete rules, log on to www.schoollife.net/schools/contest.

Awards

NFL Winners

For the ninth year, the National Football League has recognized teachers who have made an impact in the lives of the players. The NFL Teacher of the Year honorees this year include two NEA members.

Jim Waller, who teaches seventh grade social studies, geography, and world history at Bowditch Middle School in Foster City, California, was nominated by David Binn of the San Diego Chargers.

Waller appeared in the Superbowl program and a commercial about good teaching sponsored by the NFL.

Tony Kiszonas, a teacher at Southern Door High School in Brussels, Wisconsin, was nominated by Jim Flanigan of the Chicago Bears. Flanigan was in Kiszona's human anatomy and physiology class.

Leadership

NEA member Debbie Byers has won the 1998 Howard M. Soule Graduate Fellowship in Educational Leadership sponsored by the Phi Delta Kappa International graduate fellowship program.

A counselor at Evansville Central High School in Indiana, Byers received a $1,500 scholarship. She's planning on finishing her doctorate in curriculum and instruction at Southern Illinois University this fall.

Announcements

Y2K Guide

Keep your eyes open for Y2K com-

Heads Up

puter guides from the U.S. Department of Education and the Council of Great City Schools.

Squashing the Millennium Bug: A Year 2000 Compliance Guide for Elementary/Secondary Schools and School Districts contains a 57-point checklist, computer tests, Web resources, sample letters to vendors, contract clauses, and other suggestions that schools can use to assure that their computer systems function properly on January 1, 2000—and beyond.

Copies will be sent to all school districts in the United States. For more information, contact Henry Duvall at the Council of the Great City Schools, 202/393-2427. Fax: 202/393-2400. On the Web: www.cgcs.org/y2k12/.

Satellite Conference

Can't make it to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics annual meeting in San Francisco? Let a teleconference bring it to you.

On Thursday, April 22, NCTM and PBS Math Line will offer three live satellite sessions from the meeting. Participants will be able to send their questions to the panels via E-mail, Fax, or phone.

For more information, contact Gail Burrill at 414/425-7049 or NCTM at 703/620-9840. On the Web: www.nctm.org.

Go Ahead, Brag!

Have a creative lesson plan or activity that has been successful in the classroom and want to showcase it? Send it to Kathy Kobliski for her three-book educational series for parents who want to work with their children at home after school.

For more information, log on to www.beinabook.com, call 315/487-6706, or send E-mail to Media106@aol.com.

Digital Library

AT&T has donated a $3.5 million grant to the Library of Congress to support the National Digital Library project.

The library will digitize and open up access to the unique historical materials in the collections of the Library of Congress and 14 other institutions nationwide.

Sometime in the year 2000, you'll have easy access to documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg address, and Alexander Graham Bell's sketches.

For now, log on to www.loc.gov and click on American Memory.

After Mitch

Donations are urgently need to help get Central American and Caribbean schools devastated by the fury of last fall's Hurricane Mitch up and running again.

The U.S. Agency of International Development is helping collect items including batteries, electrical wiring and fixtures, chalk, blackboards, chairs, and more.

For information on how to donate items, contact Kathy Murray or Tom Scanlon at 202/965-3983. Send E-mail to bnchmrks@aol.com.

Travel Tips

Planning a trip with your high school, college, or any student youth group? Check out two free brochures—*Travel Safety Tips for Youth and Student Travelers* and *How to Organize a*

Finding the right homeowners insurance plan doesn't require exhaustive research.

How do you choose one? Simple. Just use the homeowners insurance program the National Education Association has sponsored since 1968. You'll not only get good coverage from Horace Mann, but as an NEA member, you receive some special benefits.

To find out more about the NEA Homeowners Insurance Program, you can do all your research with one phone call to your local Horace Mann agent. Or call toll-free **1-800-999-1030**, press **3**, Monday - Friday, 7 a.m. - 7 p.m. Central time.

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Student or Youth Trip.

For copies, send a request to Student & Youth Travel Association of North America, 1520 S. Lapeer Rd., Lake Orion, MI 48360 or call 248/814-7982. On the Web: www.syta.com.

Web Winners

School Papers Online

Highwired.Net has created a free online service that allows schools to create and publish their newspapers on the Internet without having to receive training or read manuals.

No software or programming is involved, so teachers and students can spend their time exploring story lines, crafting copy, and checking facts. Schools may publish papers as often as they like. For more information, contact Mark Johnson, 617/577-1500. E-mail: johnson@highwired.net. On the Web: www.highwired.net.

IDEA '97

Learn all about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act at this site, sponsored by the NEA and the Council for Exceptional Children.

For details about the law, its new regulations, effective practices, effective instructional ideas, and related resources, go to the Web at www.ideapractices.org.

News Links

Find out what's going on around the world by listening to RealAudio/Video and Television news links. If your computer can download real audio, you can use this site to download the latest news stories from ABC, PBS, NPR, and many more.

For details, contact Jonathan Prince by E-mail at JustTheNews@RadioLink.net. On the Web: http://Listen.To/TheNews.

More Current Events

Educast 2.0 now offers a new, up-to-the-minute current events channel that offers open-ended lesson plans and classroom activities for students K-12.

The free service is provided by Turner Learner-CNN, PBS ONLINE, Tomorrow Morning, and *USA Today* Education On-line. On the Web: www.educast.com.

Space Weather

The University of Michigan has created a richly illustrated and interactive primer on space weather. Many of the graphics come from top observatories and NASA. Check it out at www.windows.umich.edu/spaceweather.

Integrate Art

Want to include art in your students' curriculum? A free Web site for teachers and parents features an ArtEdventure and free online lesson plans for students of all ages. Discover fun ways to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic through art. On the Web: www.sanfordcorp.com.

Everyday Art

Need ideas for great art activities at home or in the classroom? Check out www.everydayart.com.

Updated monthly, this site provides examples from Carolyn Holm's award-winning book *Everyday Art for Kids*, available in bookstores.

For more information, contact Carolyn Holm at 510/528-7804 or send E-mail to ch@everydayart.com.

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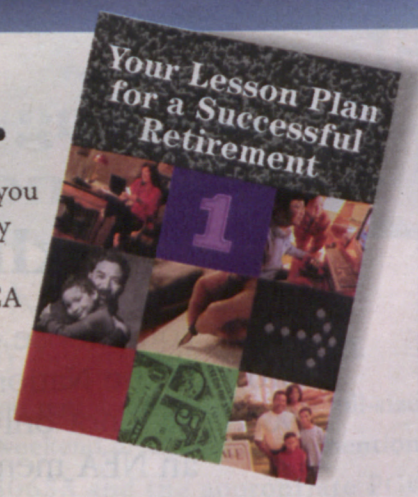
it all begins here.



When it comes to your financial future, there are no limits to what you may accomplish–especially when you have *the right plan*. That's why the NEA and Nationwide Life Insurance Company teamed up to add two new annuities to the NEA Valuebuilder Annuity Program–the NEA Valuebuilder FUTURE and the NEA Valuebuilder SELECT annuities. Both products offer a wide range of investment options so you can build a customized portfolio that reflects your risk tolerance and financial objectives. So however high your retirement goals may be, now's the time to start planning with the new and improved NEA Valuebuilder Annuity Program.

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NATIONWIDE INSURANCE Nationwide is on your side

The NEA Valuebuilder® FUTURE Annuity℠ and the NEA Valuebuilder SELECT Annuity℠ are underwritten by Nationwide Life Insurance Company, Columbus, OH 43215. The general distributor of these variable annuity contracts is Nationwide Advisory Services, Inc. Securities offered through Nationwide Investment Services Corporation, Member NASD. For more complete information, including all charges and expenses, please consult the prospectus. Prospectuses are available from your NEA Valuebuilder representative or by writing Nationwide Life Insurance Company, Attn: NEA Valuebuilder Investor Services, Inc. Two Nationwide Plaza, Columbus, Ohio 43215. Please read the prospectuses carefully before investing any money.

Withdrawals made prior to age 59½ may be subject to a 10% tax penalty. Withdrawals may be restricted for contracts issued under the terms of a tax sheltered annuity. The Internal Revenue Service prohibits certain distributions attributable to salary reductions before the individual reaches age 59½, separates from service, dies or becomes disabled, or experiences a hardship as defined by the Code.

The underlying investment options described in this ad are only available as investment options in variable life insurance policies and variable annuity contracts issued by life insurance companies and are NOT offered, or made available, to the general public directly. The NEA Valuebuilder FUTURE Annuity and NEA Valuebuilder SELECT Annuity may not be available in all states.

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In the Light Lane

How Does *Your* Garden Grow?

My kindergarten students plant seeds for a science project each spring.

I asked the class, "If seeds don't have brains, how does a bean seed know it should grow into a bean plant, instead of a carrot or cucumber?"

David raised his hand and said, "They look at the picture on their seed packet!"

Lois Bush
Knoxville, Pennsylvania

My students recently learned how to write and type reports. I stressed the importance of having accurate information on the reference page so I could easily find the sources they used.

While grading one of the papers, I noticed Adam had his source listed as *The Green Encyclopedia.*

Julie Warnemunde
Norfolk, Nebraska

After watching a film about Nebraska history, one of my second graders said, "My grandpa fought in the army and rode in a wagon like the one in the film."

Another boy very excitedly said, "Really Mike! What army did he fight for?"

Mike answered, "The Salvation Army."

Lola Meyer
Minden, Nebraska

My third grade class was getting ready to read a story about food. We talked about foods we liked and disliked.

One boy, Nick, said, "My parents make me eat a lot of vegetables."

I asked, "Are your parents vegetarians?"

"No," said Nick. "They're Italian."

Jane Grover
Munroe Falls, Ohio

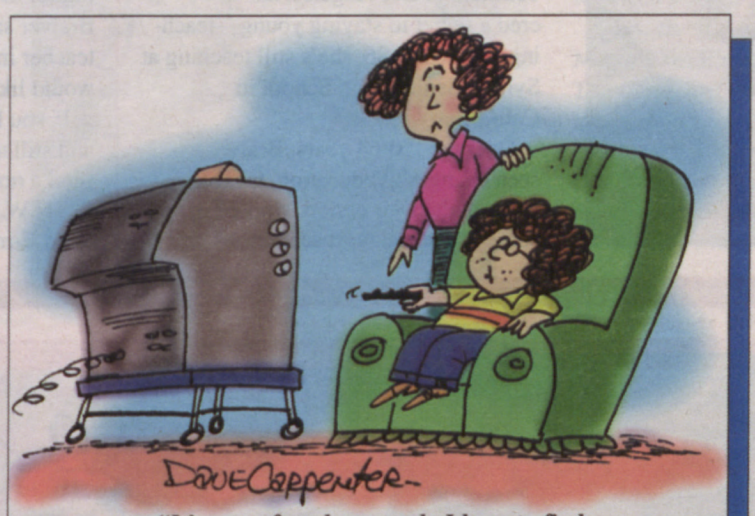
Last week, my third grade class was writing book reviews. One of my students finished her review with the following sentence: "If I were Cisal Aneaver, I would give it two thumbs up!"

I asked her the next day if she meant Siskel & Ebert. Yep. She thought it was one person. I have to give her credit, she did spell it like it sounds!

Heather Sievers
Irvine, California

I was being evaluated by the principal who visited my high school bilingual science class. An ESL student was reading aloud about the various types of "organisms" in the world. But the student mispronounced the term "organisms" and said very clearly and loudly: "There exist various types of orgasms in our world." Needless to say, the evaluator and I were the only ones laughing!

Lori Lopez
Fort Morgan, Colorado



"It's part of my homework, I have to find the English Channel."

After our winter concert, a student came into my room and asked me what "pet the ham" meant. When I told her I had no idea, she became upset and said, "You should know. They sang it at our program."

Still not understanding her, I asked her to tell me exactly where she heard it. She sang, "Follow that star, follow that star to pet the ham."

I then explained we had said, "Follow that star to Bethlehem."

Joell Rachel
Aberdeen, South Dakota

One of my kindergartners came up to my desk and said very seriously, "My grandma has ramonia."

I stifled a laugh and told her that I hoped her grandma was feeling better soon. She went back to her table and told the other children that her grandma had ramonia.

Another little girl at her table said, "I don't even know what you're talking about." A little boy said very sarcastically, "She means amonia!"

Marnie Dietz
Wendover, Nevada

In February, I was telling the class that George Washington was known as the father of our country.

Thomas asked, "What about those other three guys?" I thought he was perhaps thinking of other presidents.

I asked him to explain. He said he saw something on TV where they had talked about the forefathers.

Joyce Nigro
Iron, Minnesota

It was sharing time for my special education students. One student came up front to share about some new furniture his family bought.

"Last night, we got a new chair and love seat," said Eric.

"Tell the class what a love seat is, Eric," I said.

He looked at me and got a little red and said, "It's where people sit and make love."

Dixie Holland
Winona, Minnesota

I teach third grade in the same district that my son attends. He is a good student, so I was surprised when he got two questions wrong on a recent reading test. I asked him about one of the questions he missed. He said, "You know mom, it was one of those stories with all that *Italian* print!"

Nancy Zajac
West Bloomfield, Michigan

The ESL students in my first grade music class were very excited after our annual Just Say No to Drugs red ribbon week. I asked the class, "Who can tell me what 'Just Say No' means?" Little Julie raised her hand and proudly replied, "Just Say No means don't do drums!"

Lisa Arnold
Sioux City, Iowa

Bathroom Break

I teach high school special education students with behavioral disabilities. I try to be very in tune to my students and back off when a student seems to be having a bad day.

One day a student snapped at me when I asked him to show me his work. I asked him if he wanted to talk in the hallway about what was bothering him. He said no.

The next day he came in and apologized for "getting in my face." I asked if he was having a problem with his girlfriend or problems at home. He responded, "No, none of that. I think I was just constipated."

Ami Fishman
Glassboro, New Jersey

I had been working with intermediate elementary children for many years, but one year kindergartners were added to my recess duties.

A little boy walked up to me and told me he had to go to the bathroom. I told him that would be fine, expecting him to automatically follow the usual school procedure for leaving the playground area. I turned back to the other kids, only to feel a tug at my jacket. I looked down to find that same boy still there. He said, "You mean I can do it right here?"

Ted Ostrowski
Fairfield, Connecticut

During recess one of my boys asked if he could go inside and use the bathroom. Another teacher told him to go, but to tell her when he got back. He ran halfway across the playground, stopped, and ran back. "What do I tell you when I get back?" he asked.

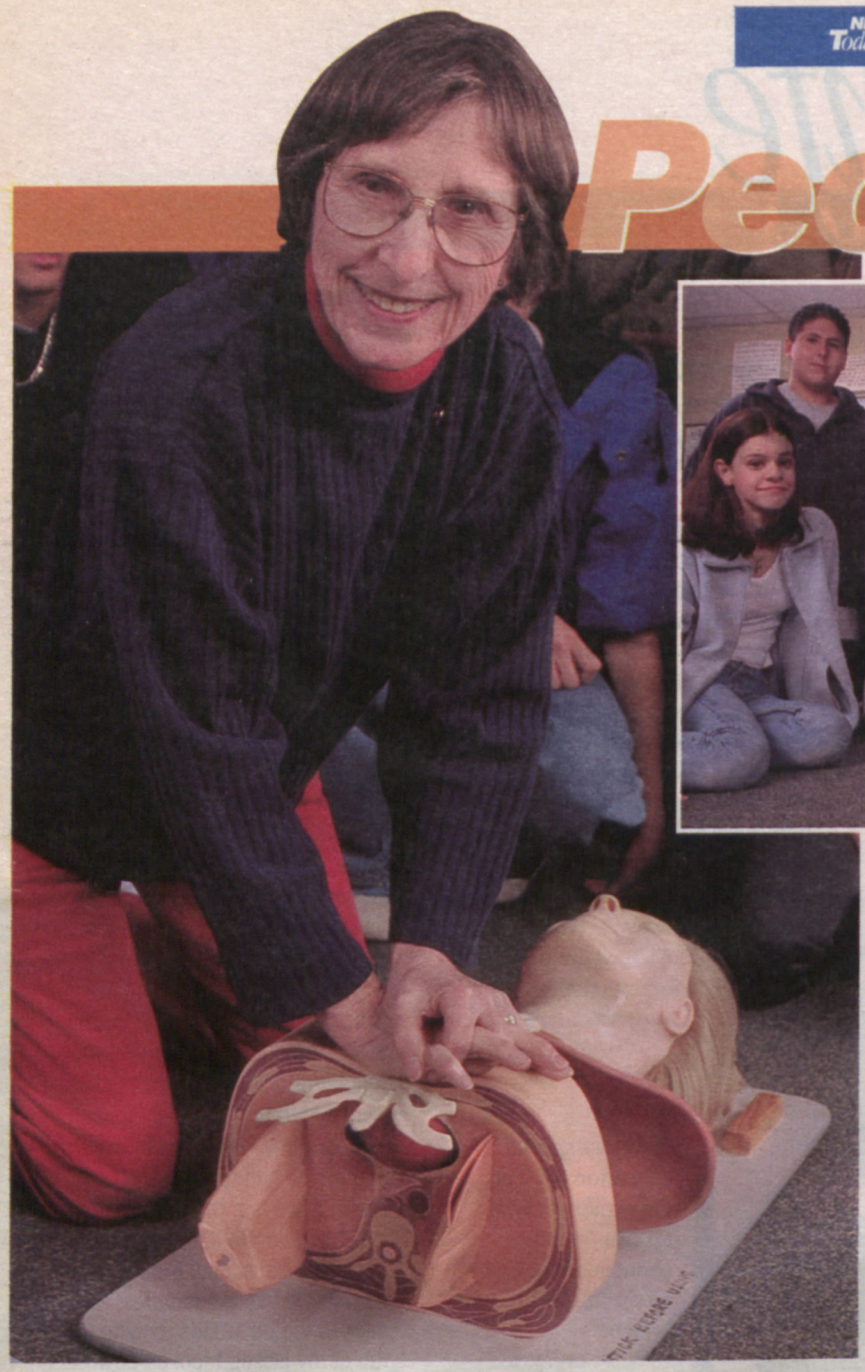
Janet Lawrence
Hubbard, Ohio

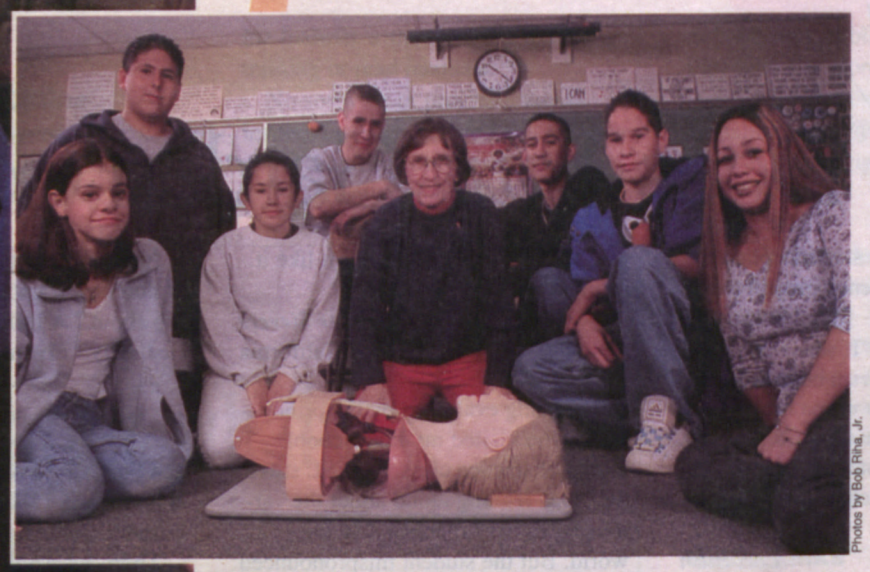
Got Laughs?

■ Have a funny school story, anecdote, or vignette you'd like to share with other NEA members? You can send contributions to "In the Light Lane," *NEA Today,* 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Fax: 202/822-7206. Send E-mail to neatoday@nea.org.

■ Want a classroom chuckle delivered to your E-mail box once a week? Subscribe to the new "In the Light Lane" mailing list. Just send an E-mail to **join-lightlane@list.nea.org** (no subject or message needed).

People





Photos by Bob Riha, Jr.

Time of Her **Life**

Eleanor Bralver, health teacher and oldest active member of the United Teachers of Los Angeles, has discovered a secret to staying young—teaching. At nearly 86, she's still teaching at Sylmar Senior High School in California.

Over the last 64 years, Bralver has seen changes in education, taught through the Depression, worked in some of the roughest sections of Detroit, and raised two sons.

"I remember when they cut out phonics, and I said, 'There goes reading.' and it did." "But," she adds, "now they're bringing it back."

With a spring in her step and full of energy, Bralver often jokes with her students about her age, calling herself an "old lady."

One student objected and said, "You're not old."

Bralver responded, "Well what is old?"

The student said, "Anybody over 30."

Though she plans to continue teaching for at least another 10 years, Bralver says, "I think I am the oldest teacher in the U.S. still teaching—I would like to know for sure."

If you know of anyone who is older and still teaching in a public school, send a note to *NEA Today*, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Send E-mail to neatoday@nea.org.

Lessons in **Legislation**

When Minnesota teacher **Mae Schunk** got a call from a former student's parent asking her to consider running for lieutenant governor with former professional wrestler Jesse "The Body" Ventura, her jaw dropped.

Her response: "I think you have the wrong person."

Her husband's response: "It's an honor to even be asked. Go for it."

So Schunk, a teacher at the Phalen Lake Elementary School in St. Paul, and member of Education Minnesota, dropped everything and ran—for office.

Getting past first impressions, Schunk found she and Ventura are a good match. They've got similar ideas on education, family values, and, most of all, class size.

Together they plan to reduce the student teacher ratio to 17:1, which Schunk says will result in greater individual student attention and parent involvement.

All the excitement aside, Schunk misses the classroom. To keep in touch she plans to visit schools in each of the state's 348 districts. "I am learning a lot about government," she says, "and I hope to take all this new information back to the classroom."

Photos by Ariana Lindquist

Home Run **Curriculum**

Arizona teacher **William Tecku** realized he was striking out when pitching the work of dead poets to his students. So he tossed them his own 1,000-word poem, about record-breaking baseball hero Mark McGwire.

"I'm on my second or third step toward first base, the stadium's rockin', the crowd's on its feet cheerin'..."

It may not be Casey at the Bat, but it's part of *Slugger McGwire's 9th Inning Dream*, Tecku's 70-minute tape-recorded poem, filled with background stadium sounds. The poem is used to teach students in his American literature class literary elements, including point of view, foreshadowing, and parallel structure.

Tecku, a lifelong Cardinal fan, says his baseball curriculum is a grand slam with kids.

"Even those who don't like baseball, know about McGwire," says Tecku. "I've noticed the students were more on task and focused than when studying other writers."

For a copy of the curriculum, send an E-mail message to Tecku at RICCITECKU@worldnet.att.net.

Michael Ricci Tecku

Lisa Waddell Buser

We Are **Family**

Thirteen years ago, it was an easy decision for **Billie Lacy**, a young, single kindergarten teacher, to become a foster parent.

It was much tougher two years ago when she decided to become legal guardian to the three sisters and an eight-month-old infant—all on a single teacher's salary.

Lacy, an NEA member and teacher at Manor Lake Elementary in Memphis, Tennessee, met 18-year-old Kaylyndra in her classroom 13 years ago.

When Kaylyndra's natural mother could no longer raise her, Lacy invited the girl and her two younger sisters to live in Lacy's home. For several years, the girls stayed with Lacy off and on.

Two years ago the teenage girls got tired of being shuffled around between foster homes and begged Lacy to accept the formal title, "mom." She did.

"The girls deserve a chance to grow up in a loving environment," says Lacy.

The new family of six includes Lacy, the three teens, Kaylyndra's 8-month-old son, and Lacy's own 7-year-old son.

"We struggle, but we're making it," Lacy says. "Love makes up for the extra things we don't have."

Last October, television talk show host Oprah Winfrey saluted Lacy on-air as part of a show highlighting people who have done good deeds.

Safety at Your **Service**

It's 10 a.m., three buses out of a fleet of 38 are already down, and **Virgil Ates** is a very busy man.

Like many bus mechanics across the country, Ates, a 12-year employee of the Fenton, Michigan, schools, is a "one-person fix it crew." Unlike most other mechanics, he's also an inventor.

To save time and boost safety, Ates has helped invent a safety tool called Lite-Check, which allows school bus drivers to test their brake lights by themselves.

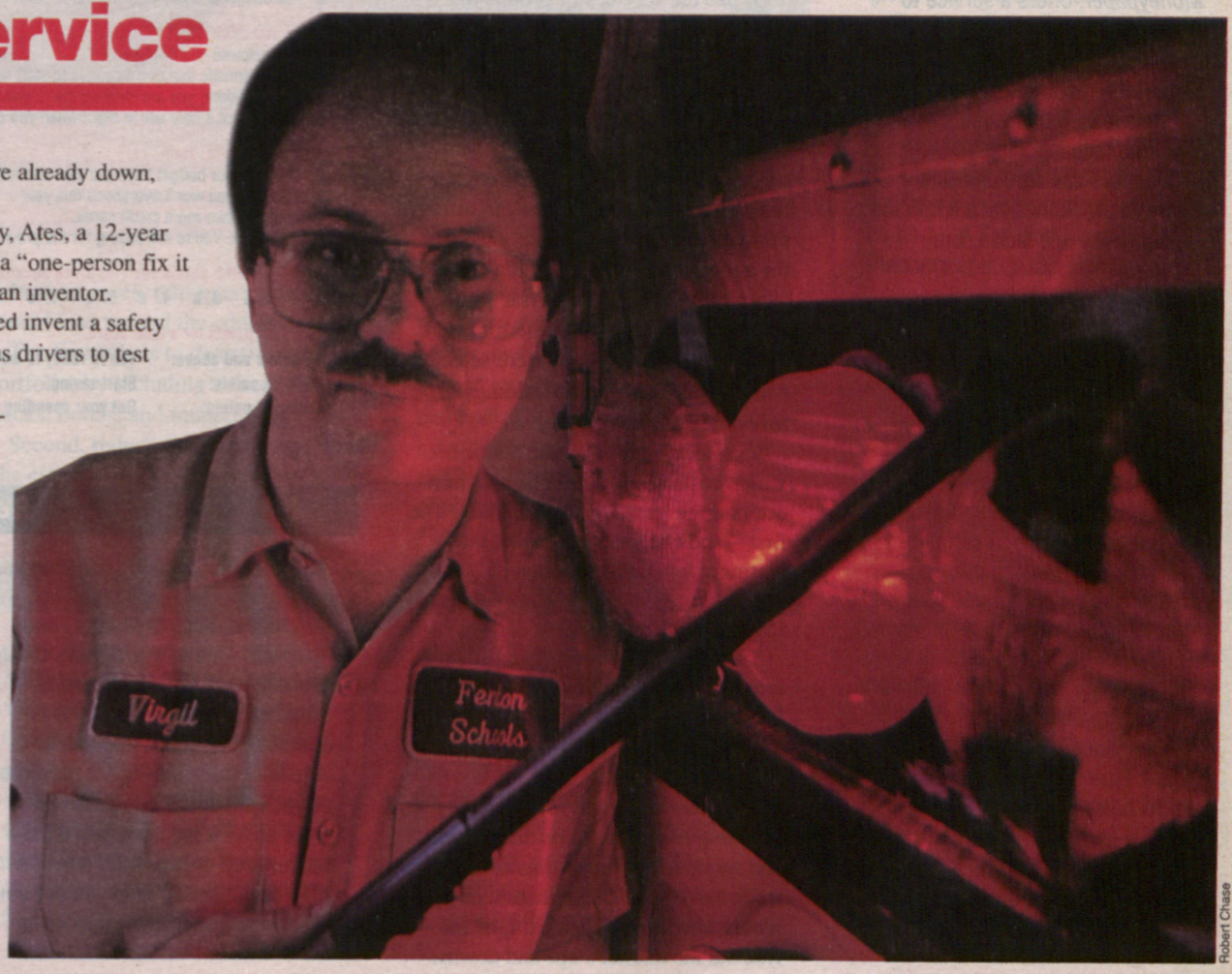
A spring-loaded rod that fits between the driver's seat and the brake pedal, this tool lets drivers see if the brake lights are working—without asking someone else to go outside the bus and take a look. The Lite-Check helps save time for bus drivers during their pre-trip checks, Ates says.

Safety is a big concern to Ates. A few years ago, he constructed a "mock bus"—with flashing safety lights, a stop sign, and a new crossing gate—which is used in elementary school gyms districtwide to teach bus safety to kids.

How do kids respond to the presentation?

"They ask a lot of questions," says Ates. "But some pick up on it pretty quickly."

Ates' safety efforts have not gone unnoticed. In 1997, the Michigan Association of Pupil Transportation named him the School Bus Mechanic of the Year.



Robert Chase

Money

Getting Started

What is a DRIP?

A DRIP, or dividend reinvestment plan, allows investors in a particular company to reinvest dividends and to add small additional amounts of money to buy stock directly from the company.

Initially DRIPs were restricted to shareholders, employees, and customers. But it didn't take long for creative investors to figure out they could become a shareholder of their favorite company by buying just one share of stock.

Once a shareholder, an investor can build holdings in a company by sending in small amounts of money—like $50—once a month over many years. The company buys fractional shares for the account. And the dividends, of course, are reinvested.

The DRIP programs are good for companies because shareholders make loyal customers. They can also be allies in a hostile takeover. Not surprisingly, then, over the past couple of years, a number of companies—about 200 to 300—have agreed to sell shares directly to investors who are not yet shareholders.

Vita Nelson, editor of *The Moneypaper*, offers a service to help investors get started by buying the first share of a stock and getting it registered for a $15 fee. For details visit their Web site at www.moneypaper.com.

Investors can also use One Share of Stock Inc., located on the Web at www.one share.com.

Did You Know?

That the NEA Member Benefits Web site can help you decide what to do with your income tax refund? Whether you're looking to invest your windfall for a rainy day or just sock it away until you can take that big vacation, you can find an option that's right for you. Get the current rates for the NEA-Sponsored FDIC-Insured Money Market Account and NEA GoldCertificate® CD. Learn more about the NEA Valuebuilder® Mutual Fund Program. Find out what you should know before choosing a travel agent—or how to apply for a passport. Check out the NEA Member Benefits Web site at www.neamb. com

Can You Afford . . .?

Buying Stocks the Smart Way

Stop paying as you go and start planning for that dream.

Getting started in stock market investing can be tough. It can be costly to set up an account at a brokerage house and to buy substantial amounts of the dozen or so different stocks needed to build a diversified portfolio.

The best way to get started is to use a strategy called dollar-cost averaging, which is a fancy term for making regular, systematic investments in a stock regardless of the price.

Studies have shown that investors who do that tend to pay less per share over time than those who purchase shares in a block. Dollar-cost averaging works particularly well in a volatile sector of the market, like technology, because the same $100 a month buys more shares when the price is down, and less when the price is up.

There are a number of ways to set up systematic stock investments.

One, is to make regular purchases of stock through an online discount broker.

Or use the services of groups like the National Association of Investment Clubs (NAIC), which helps educate investors about stocks. NAIC's stock service consolidates your purchases onto one statement.

The stock service works through a broker, MMS Securities Inc., to offer the stocks of 230 different companies for a regular investment as low as $10 a month. The NAIC buys fractional shares to equal the investment of each member. The companies were selected because they are the top holdings of investment club members.

Investors must be NAIC members, which costs $39 a year. The program offers three levels of participation. The first—and cheapest—is called the platinum level. Here you pay $200 a year and then just pennies per share for the trades you make.

The other levels—gold and silver—require a lower annual fee, but higher fees are required to trade. These levels are uneconomical for all except the most inactive investors.

The most important rule about investing in stock is to be disciplined and set up regular investments into your stock fund every single month, no matter how small. Then sit tight and ride out the market's ups and downs.

The first step in investing is to get your spending under control.

Take this quiz to see where you stand:

When planning a vacation, you:
- a. Wait until the last minute, spend too much, then feel it wasn't worth it.
- b. Change your mind, deciding you can't spare the money.
- c. Budget in advance to get the best deal.
- d. Go all out. After all your job is stressful, and you need the relaxation, no matter what the cost.

When you get your paycheck, you:
- a. Have money skimmed off the top for your 403 (b) plan and various pre-tax spending accounts. The rest is allocated to budget items.
- b. Pay bills that have piled up since your last paycheck—and find there is nothing left.
- c. Go on a shopping spree; you'll pay the bills later.
- d. Put it all in savings.

Your favorite store announces a going-out-of business sale. You:
- a. Check the limits on all your credit cards and get in line early the first day of the sale.
- b. Check your list of equipment you were planning to buy over the next year.
- c. Stay home.
- d. Buy your dream equipment; you'll skip your vacation this year.

What is the highest interest rate you pay on a credit card?
- a. You take what you can get.
- b. 18 percent.
- c. You don't know.
- d. 14 percent.

You've just been recruited for your first job after college. You:
- a. Draw up a budget and arrange to save 10 percent of your salary.
- b. Decline to sign up for a 403(b) plan; retirement is a long way away.
- c. Borrow from your parents to buy a work wardrobe and a new car.
- d. Arrange for a line of credit.

Which best describes the way you make purchases?
- a. You spend when you are happy or sad.
- b. You spend to catch up with your friends' lifestyles.
- c. You spend in cycles, running up credit card debt and then paying it down.
- d. You budget and buy only what is on your list.

When you think about your financial situation, you:
- a. Feel helpless
- b. Feel optimistic that you'll be able to start saving soon.
- c. Feel confident; you are meeting the targets you've set for yourself.
- d. Think about it only late at night when you can't sleep.

It's holiday time. You:
- a. Pull out your budget from last year and inflate it by the consumer price index
- b. Vow that you won't overspend this year
- c. Apply for two more credit cards.
- d. Get drunk. You're still paying for the previous holiday and your cards are charged to the limit.

Give yourself 5 points each for these answers:

1. c 2. a 3. b 4. d 5. a 6. d 7. c 8. a

Add your points for a total score.

35 points and above:	**You're ready to invest.**
25 to 35 points:	**Start saving.**
Under 25 points:	**Get your spending under control.**

Resources

NEA Member Benefits can help you get started on investing through the NEA Valuebuilder® Mutual Fund Program. This new program, created especially for NEA members, is designed by financial experts to address your needs and goals, whether you're saving for retirement or your children's education.

As an NEA member, you'll get a customized mutual fund investment plan developed to help you put your money to work. You'll also get a Personal Investment Profile that will describe you as an investor, and reflect your comfort level with various types of investments.

Most important, the Profile shows you how to allocate your money among investment categories that best suit your goals. To begin investing with the NEA Valuebuilder Mutual Fund Program, call NEA's MBC Investor Services Company toll free at 800/637-4636, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET.

Investing for Retirement

Before you invest in anything, develop a long-term plan, then work on creating a balanced portfolio.

Who:
Donna New Haschke, 51, vice president of the Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA) in Austin, Texas

Financial Goal:
To invest for retirement

Game Plan:
"Because I'm no longer teaching, I can't put money into my 403(b) plan," says Haschke, who taught for 25 years before taking leave in 1997 to serve as full-time vice president of TSTA.

"But I have other investments. For example, I've put some money into several mutual funds through NEA's Valuebuilder Program. I started investing in 1992, and since then I've at least doubled my money, so it's been very profitable. My only regret is that I didn't start investing much earlier in my career."

The Experts Say:
The problem most investors face is they don't have a long-term plan. Instead, they buy what their broker recommends or what the latest issue of *Money* magazine says is hot.

Formulating an investment plan begins with goal setting. You may think your goal is obvious. You want enough money for retirement, period. But as a retirement investor, you should actually have three investment goals:

- Preservation of principal, which means keeping and protecting the money you've already got.
- Growth of principal or making your money grow into a larger nest egg.
- Earning income from dividends and interest or by drawing on your savings.

To reach all three goals, you need a balanced portfolio—one that includes different types of investments, including stocks, bonds, money market accounts, and real estate. Your portfolio should offset riskier investments with safer ones.

When it comes to risk, the more you're willing to accept, the greater your potential reward. You should know how much risk you can comfortably tolerate, as well as how much you need to accept.

If you're a nervous investor, you should lean toward safer investments. But keep in mind that in order to make your nest egg grow, you have to accept some risk. If you're a long way from reaching your financial goals, you may have to accept more risk to increase your return.

Third, remember that the riskiest thing you can do is play it completely safe. By sticking all or most of your investments in the safest—but lowest-yielding—investments, such as insured bank accounts, you miss out on growth. And, with inflation, you could actually lose money.

Keep in mind that you don't necessarily need just one portfolio all the time. Some investors periodically shift their investment strategy, starting aggressively when young, leaning toward moderation during middle age, and ending with a conservative portfolio at retirement. Others argue that a middle strategy is best for most people of all ages.

In most cases, retirement investing should lean toward the conservative.

The first rule is to diversify your portfolio, by including a mixed bag of stocks, bonds, and mutual funds.

Second, reduce risk as you get older. The closer you get to retirement, the less time you have to make up for losses from risky investments that fail.

Mark Matson

Texas State Teachers Association Vice President Donna New Haschke began investing in mutual funds six years ago. She wishes she'd started earlier.

Resources

Most financial planners agree that retirees will need 60 to 80 percent of their pre-retirement income to maintain their current standard of living.

As an NEA member, you can put money aside every month in a tax-deferred annuity. NEA Member Benefits and Nationwide Life Insurance Company developed the NEA Valuebuilder® Annuity Program featuring the NEA Valuebuilder FUTURE and the NEA Valuebuilder SELECT annuities. Both products help you build a customized portfolio that reflects your risk tolerance and financial objectives.

Call 800/NEA-VALUE (800/632-8258) to request your free NEA Valuebuilder Lesson Plan for a Successful Retirement.

Continuing On

I'd like to enlist the help of a financial planner, but how can I make sure I get financial advice I can trust?

There are several steps you can take to make sure you get trustworthy advice. Arm yourself with knowledge. Go to the library or get on the Internet and read up on mutual funds, life insurance, and annuities.

Second, ask about the planner's background. Find out how long the planner has been in business and what kinds of clients he has. Look for a planner with a minimum of 10 years of experience. Ask for the names of several clients you can speak with who have been with the planner for at least three years.

Third, avoid planners who are basically insurance agents or stockbrokers. The planner should be registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Credentials to look for include: Certified Financial Planner (CFP), Chartered Financial Consultant (ChFC), or Accredited Personal Financial Specialist (APFS).

Next, find out if the planner is fee-based or receives a commission. In most cases, a fee-based planner gives more objective advice.

Finally, call the Better Business Bureau to see if the planner has ever been sued by clients or had disciplinary actions taken against him.

For a free guide on how to select a planner, plus a list of certified financial planners in your area, call the Institute of Certified Financial Planners at 800/282-PLAN.

Retiring Soon?

Thinking about retirement? Don't forget that membership in NEA-Retired offers you a continuation of Association activism, benefits tailored to your needs as a retiree, plus workshops, conferences, and volunteer opportunities.

You'll also receive *NEA Retired* magazine, a bimonthly publication covering Association news and the latest on Social Security, pension, and health issues—as well as feature articles on NEA-Retired members around the country.

Join now as a pre-retired member. Contact NEA-Retired, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. On the Web at www.nea.org/retired.

My Turn

When Censorship Gets Personal

The war on public education is easy to ignore—until it comes, uninvited, to your classroom.

By Derrick Neill

John Miller

NEA member Derrick Neill, a science teacher at Arizona's Sierra Vista Middle School, has written a second novel, Duck Egg Blue *(Prometheus Books, 1999). He can be reached at svmssciguy@yahoo.com.*

Since the 1980s, a war has raged in our public schools. At stake: our ability to teach children critical and independent thinking. Big war, big stakes, but I didn't have time.

I stood by while a California school board adopted a policy putting creationism "on an equal footing with evolution." I stood by while my state, Arizona, passed a moment of silence law promoting school prayer.

I stood by when my school board banned a sex education pamphlet that mentioned homosexuality. And I stood by when a *teacher* at my own school sponsored a Christian club, which federal law says is illegal.

I'm ashamed that it took me so long to enlist in the battle. Here's why I finally did.

Two years ago, the would-be censors set their sights on me—and my novel *Adventures in Spacetime* (Dan River Press, 1996).

Since I take an intercurricular approach in my classes, and since I discovered that science fiction is the perfect vehicle for teaching science, English, history, and more, it's only natural that I started using my book as a supplemental resource.

And it worked great the first year. The kids loved it, we got lots of positive media attention for the school, and I even won two teaching awards.

But the second year was another story. Oh, the kids still loved the book. But a small, but well-organized group of parents didn't. Four to be exact.

Their complaint? They said "profanity" and two sentences of "sexual content" made the book inappropriate. They also claimed I wasn't teaching science. Oh yeah, and they called the book "garbage."

Needless to say, I was taken aback. And I was angry. The language in my book is tame compared to other challenged books, like Hinton's *The Outsiders*. Its sexual content is mild compared to Blume's *Forever*.

Besides, I've used Crichton's *Jurassic Park* for 10 years, and no one said a word. No, something else was going on. I just didn't know what.

Why couldn't these parents understand that teaching students critical literacy—and there's no real literacy that's not critical—means exposing them to more than facts? Learning to separate fact from fiction and fact from opinion requires seeing all three.

No doubt, this misunderstanding was part of the problem. But something still told me there was more.

Then, one day, the librarian pulled me aside. The parents who complained about my book were reviewing the videos I show—videos on evolution.

When the librarian described how the parents scoffed at the science videos, a light bulb lit. You see, my novel is a parallel time-track story involving—you guessed it—evolution.

Now, in all fairness, the parents never admitted evolution was the problem. And, in the end, I guess it's moot. Thanks to supportive colleagues and administrators and a fair-minded school board, I was allowed to continue using my book in class.

But the story doesn't end there. How did all of this affect the four students most directly involved?

The children of three of the complaining parents promptly dropped my class. One, let's call him John, didn't. He told me several times that he liked me, the class, and the book.

At the end of the school year, John's English teacher told me she assigned an essay, asking students to select their favorite science fiction device and explain why they picked it.

"John chose a time machine," she said. "It seems he's wondering where we all came from and he wants to travel back in time so he can find out how everything *really* happened."

I couldn't help but smile. It was just the kind of independent thinking book-banners don't like. It threatens their morality, and it frightens them.

But, thanks to them, one eighth grade boy had an intellectual growth spurt. And, thanks to them, the fight for intellectual freedom—for public schools that allow *all* voices to be heard—has one more soldier, heavily armed with the written word. Me.

You Said It

Bill Fischer, editor

Our February cover story about National Board certification reminded me of our first big *NEA Today* article on national certification, back in 1994, when the idea of National Board recognition for teachers was just starting to become a reality.

Our December issue that year featured several NEA members waiting to hear whether they had passed the very first assessment administered by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. (They all, it turned out, did.)

Among the very first to win national certification were New Mexico teachers Sue Strasia and Evelyn Sanchez, who recently wrote *NEA Today* about their experiences.

Five years ago, the two Rio Rancho elementary teachers explained, they didn't know one another. Then they spent a year of intensive work together, which led to their national certificates.

That experience totally sold Strasia and Sanchez on the value of the national certification process, and the two are now tireless recruiters and advocates for the National Board.

Thanks to their efforts, another 23 teachers from their district have gone through the certification process. Of these, 18 have become nationally certified.

Strasia and Sanchez have personally mentored nine teachers. Eight of the nine have passed, and Rio Rancho could soon have at least one nationally certified teacher in nine of the district's 10 schools.

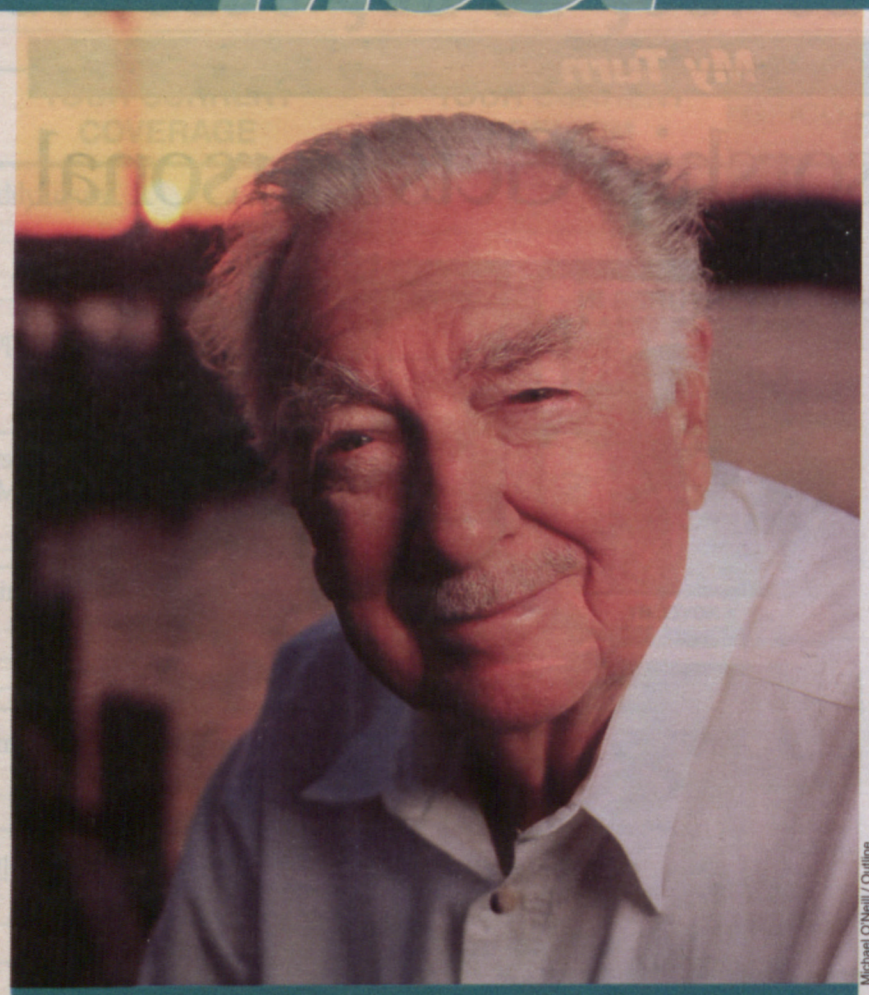
Going through national certification, Strasia and Sanchez feel strongly, helps teachers develop new confidence in themselves—and respect for their practice.

Even more important, they point out, is the impact on students. Learning in Rio Rancho has blossomed as teachers have implemented the ideas and strategies they've refined through the certification process.

The quickest way to find out more about national certification? Check the Web at www.nbpts.org.

Bill Fisher

Meet



Michael O'Neill / Outline

Walter Cronkite

On Education

You know his views on war, presidents, press freedom, and space. Now, Cronkite on public education.

He hasn't anchored the CBS Evening News since 1981, but Walter Cronkite, now 82, is still probably the most trusted journalist in America today.

Cronkite was there for so many events in our lives, we think we know him. But what do we really know about Cronkite's views on education, teaching, and democracy?

NEA Today*'s Stefanie Weiss spoke recently with Cronkite about school.*

In your memoir, you rave about your high school journalism teacher.

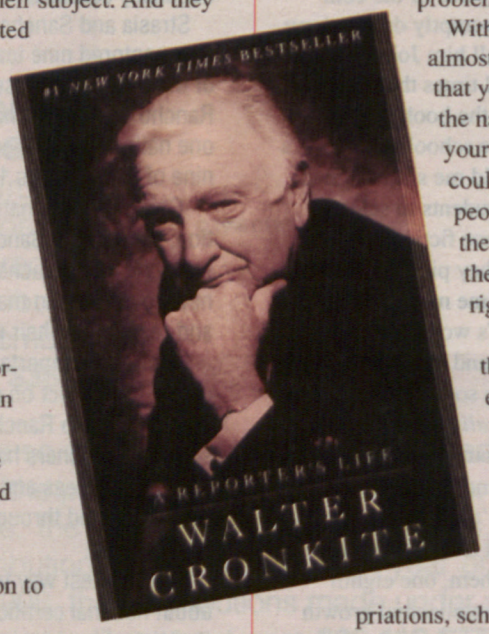
Yes. Fred Birney was, to my mind, an inspired teacher—and he wasn't a teacher at all, at least not with regard to formal training.

He was a newspaper man, but he was dedicated to wanting young people to understand what journalism was about. He sold the school system on letting him go out and teach a journalism course—one hour, once a week in each of five schools in Houston.

Fred helped make the school newspapers much more professional. And he took us, for the first time, to the printing plant, taught us page make-up. He infected us with the excitement of newspaper work.

How can today's journalism teachers measure up?

Like all teachers, they should have enthusiasm for their subject. And they should be dedicated to trying to get young people to understand the marvels of the subject they're teaching.



Specifically, I think journalism teachers today have a very important role to play in trying to teach young people the principles of good journalism—the values of honest, forthright devotion to the facts, and an eschewing of insidious personal opinion.

You blame low voter turnout, in part, on schools that turn out graduates "too illiterate to participate meaningfully in a democracy." Why?

I have a feeling that education is the answer to nearly every problem.

With education, almost every problem that you can put before the nation, the world, your local community could be solved. If people understood the problems better, they would make the right decisions.

Unfortunately, there's a lack of education on the part of people who will vote their personal greed in failing to support school appropriations, school bonds, and school taxes.

Because they don't have children or aren't interested in their own children's welfare, they put dollars and cents ahead of education.

My feeling has always been that education should demand our first priority in expenditures, challenged only by public health. And I'm not so sure about that, since the solutions to public health problems depend a great deal on the education of the public in the first place.

So, to my mind, everything goes back to that one, basic, fundamental question: Is the public's knowledge adequate to deal with the complicated problems of the day?

What can educators do to increase young people's interest in democracy?

Educators are the keystone of the successful continuation of our democracy. So I would like to see our teachers do a better job.

I know that the inspirational teacher was a rarity in my day. In particular, I found history badly taught. I can't imagine making history dull, and yet nearly all my history teachers made it incredibly dull, by forcing memorization of dates, names, and places, instead of dramatizing—without in any way distorting—the human conflict that's the basis of all history.

What's the connection between journalism and history?

All journalists who have dedicated themselves to serious subjects—the national political scene, the economy, foreign affairs—are historians.

That's what journalism is. It's current history. Each day, we are writing tomorrow's history.

And that's just one of the reasons for the need for accuracy. It's not just to inform the public today, but to be sure that tomorrow's historians have the story correctly, as it actually happened.

It's tempting for any of us writing or broadcasting to try to make the story a little more interesting by perhaps just a touch of imagination.

But that coloring that we do today could mislead historians, send them down the wrong track, lead them to misinterpret individuals and their conflicts.

You've shown your concern about democracy by helping the Interfaith Alliance, a faith-based group that's dedicated to protecting basic American freedoms. Why?

Because I'm very concerned about the attempt by one group to usurp the principles of Christianity. Those in the religious right are challenging our freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of worship by their advocacy. They claim that those who disagree with them cannot be good Christians. I strongly object to that.

Resources

■ *A Reporter's Life.* Walter Cronkite. Ballantine Books, 1997, 400 pps., $14. At local bookstores. To order a copy on the Web for $11.20, go to www.amazon.com.

■ *The United States Constitution: All You Want To Know.* Walter Cronkite, narrator. Audio cassette. Simon & Schuster, 1998, $22, 800/223-2348.

■ *American Presidents: The Most Powerful Man on Earth.* Walter Cronkite, presenter. Mentorom Multimedia, in collaboration with the National Archives and Presidential Libraries. CD-ROM software edition, 1996, $29.98, 800/214-3668. On the Web: www.mentorom.com.

■ For more information on the Interfaith Alliance, the advocacy group that Walter Cronkite lends his name to, go to the Web at www.tialliance.org.

Debate

Should teachers and support staff be able to suspend students?

Yes

Celina Mann, a high school Spanish and ESL teacher in San Diego, California, also serves as a mentor teacher, department chair, and professional growth advisor. Mann is an Association activist at the local, state, and national levels. You can reach her via E-mail at dmann@pacbell.net.

Americans can show that they truly respect teachers by trusting us to take whatever steps are necessary to effectively discipline our students.

That's not an easy task today—not when so many students come to school without adequate rest or nourishment. Not when so many students are familiar with violence, carry the frustration and anger of abandonment, and are burdened with drug and alcohol problems.

These students don't have the coping skills necessary to deal with their problems. They lack the discipline they need at home.

Yet we find ways to teach most of them grammar and math, values and respect. Most, but unfortunately, not all. We don't have the resources or the time to reach all the troubled students in our classes.

So we seek help from administrators. Some of them deal with the problems. Some are supportive. Some send kids to the few available continuation schools for students with behavior problems.

But other administrators allow students with chronic behavior problems to continue disrupting classes without consequences.

Some transfer students from school to school without addressing the cause of their problems. Most don't want a high "number of suspensions per site" on their records.

Where administrators fail in providing a quality learning environment for all students, teachers must be allowed to step in.

In San Diego, we have that right.

Article 11 in the contract negotiated by the San Diego Education Association states:

"A teacher may suspend any pupil for his/her class or class period . . . for the day of suspension and the day following. The suspension is to be a last resort after the failure of other forms of discipline."

The contract goes on to stipulate that teachers must notify parents and administrators, teachers can repeat the suspension if the behavior continues, and students will not be returned to a teachers' classroom "without the concurrence of the teacher and principal."

Our contract covers only certificated personnel, but I believe classroom support staff—often entrusted with rule enforcement and behavior management—should also have the right to suspend students.

When all staff have the power to enforce a natural sequence of consequences, students will be more likely to behave appropriately in all settings.

Given our contractual rights, you may think that suspensions are widely used, even abused, here. But that's not the case.

No one wants to suspend students. Still, after all other disciplinary methods have failed, suspension can be a valuable and effective way to deal with habitual behavior problems and extreme circumstances.

Suspensions can help diffuse tensions by giving students and teachers a time out. They allow all involved to start a new day under a new light. And they help restore an orderly and productive learning environment.

All students have the right to be taught. When we have the right to suspend, we can protect the rights of the students who want to learn. And we can do what we want to do—teach.

No

Paula Varner teaches English as a Second Language to Clarkmoor Elementary students in Tacoma, Washington. A 28-year veteran teacher and Association activist, Verner's taught in California and worked as an adjunct professor in Washington. She can be reached at pjvarner@yahoo.com.

The decision to suspend a student requires thoughtful consideration, research, investigation, and consultation with others. Making that decision is an awesome responsibility that teachers and support staff shouldn't take on.

Here's why:

■ No one, including a principal, should be able to suspend a student on a moment's notice. Suspension is serious business. It has long-term consequences for all those involved.

■ Teachers and support employees don't have enough time to do everything required to make sure suspension is the right decision.

The events leading up to a suspension are rarely black and white. They require time to sort out, time to get to the truth, and time to find the punishment that both suits the crime and benefits the student. Administrators have the time; teachers don't.

■ Classroom educators often don't see all sides of the suspension issue. I know I didn't until I did the coursework and internship required to earn an administrative/principal's certificate.

When substituting for a principal years ago, I suspended a student for a weapons violation in a "no tolerance" district. But I did so after making use of every resource available to me—teachers, parents, district administrative personnel, and the cooperating principal for the building.

Finally, the father and I worked together thoughtfully to fashion a creative and cooperative punishment that we believed would affect the child in a positive way.

As the acting principal, I was able to rearrange a portion of my day to spend the hours necessary to deal with this situation. As a classroom educator, I would have had to take time away from other students to handle things well.

■ Teachers and support employees don't have the legal training they need to handle suspensions. A suspension is, by definition, a denial of the right to a free and appropriate public education. Denial of a basic right requires following due process and specific, detailed procedures.

■ The laws governing suspension—in Washington state, at least—are complex, especially in the special education arena. A mistake or omission can lead to significant personal liability and civil rights complaints. Who needs that aggravation?

■ Teachers and support staff have other—often better—ways to deal with inappropriate student behavior than suspensions.

As spelled out in a school's discipline policy, teachers can send kids to time-out in or out of the classroom, assign detention, contact parents, have kids write letters of apology, take away recess, take away some other privilege, or find another, appropriate punishment.

If these avenues fail to correct the problem, teachers can take the case to the principal with a recommendation, then leave the matter there.

■ Finally, teachers and support employees should make decisions based on their educational value to the students involved.

Suspensions won't do any good if students aren't learning from them. And they won't do any good if they don't, in the long run, contribute to a quality education.

What's Your Opinion?

Should teachers and support staff have the right to suspend students?

To vote, visit our Web site at **www.nea.org/neatoday** and see the results instantly.

Should student test scores be used to evaluate teachers?

The tally on this Debate question from the last issue of *NEA Today:*

13% Yes **87% No**

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Health Resources

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Books

Let Us Now Praise *School*

Can a coffee table book be profound? You bet.

School
Robert Coles and Nicholas Nixon. *Bulfinch Press (Little, Brown and Company), 176 pp., $35 at bookstores, $24.50 at www.amazon.com.*

Little, Brown and Company

Coffee table books rarely offer both heft and depth. *School* by Pulitzer prize-winning child psychiatrist Robert Coles and photographer Nicholas Nixon is a notable exception.

In the documentary tradition of James Agee and Walker Evans, author and photographer of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* Coles and Nixon capture single moments and brief conversations that, like puzzle pieces, fit beautifully together.

Now it's best to understand that this puzzle is a challenge of the 5,000-piece variety. Sure, you can enjoy some of the pieces by themselves—the photographs, for instance. But you won't get the whole picture without investing time, effort, and patience.

The final payoff: a spectacular tapestry of the sights and sounds, recordings and reflections, the will and wisdom that make up school.

School captures life at three public schools in the Boston area—John M. Tobin elementary, the selective public Boston Latin High School, and the Perkins School for the Blind.

Each of the three chapters includes photographs, quotes from students and teachers that double as captions, and an essay by the prolific Coles.

In the first essay, Coles recounts two conversations—the first with a student who wants to "spend more time on what you really want to know," and the second with a teacher who brushes off compliments as part of her need to be self-critical, to grow in her "job, but also a calling."

In the second, Coles recounts a long conversation he once had with an African-American student, who struggles with the stigma of being bright, while idolizing an unlikely duo—Arthur Ashe and Julius Caesar.

In the last, Coles lets loose on the senses, bouncing from Anna Freud to Raymond Carver, and beyond.

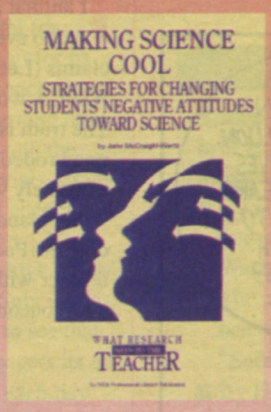
"Indeed," Coles writes of Nixon's photos, "in picture after picture human activity and human connection become so sharply defined and confined that we are carried from the visual to the visionary."

You may need to read it five times, but, trust me, it only gets more brilliant.

—Stefanie Weiss

New from the NEA Professional Library

Making Science Cool: Strategies for Changing Students' Negative Attitudes Towards Science. Jane Wertz. NEA Professional Library, 32 pp., $4.50.


MAKING SCIENCE COOL
STRATEGIES FOR CHANGING STUDENTS' NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD SCIENCE
WHAT RESEARCH SAYS TO THE TEACHER

Many students feel that science is a boring, difficult, and irrelevant subject. How can you counteract the negative images of science and scientists?

In *Making Science Cool,* teacher and elementary science expert Jane Wertz blends an overview of the literature—how researchers link positive attitudes with student success—with her own classroom-based research findings. You'll learn about her strategies for altering the classroom environment to make science exciting, accessible, and relevant. And you'll discover how to involve your students and their parents in the process.

For more information or to order, call 800/229-4200.

EXCERPT

We all know how great science museums are and that they make super field trips, but if we are attempting to change student attitudes toward science and help them to view it as something "cool," we must meet them on their own territory.

The local shopping mall is a great place for scientific exploration! Elevators, escalators, sources of light and sound, water fountains, ramps, and plant and animal life can all be used to introduce or illustrate science concepts.

Books by NEA Members

Each Writes Of Passage
Gary Bacon, in collaboration with students. *Rainbow Bridge, 183 pp., $14.95 plus $2 s&h to 823 Forest Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94301, 650/321-7458.* Nine teens—faced with rape, poverty, prejudice, drugs, and more—write of passage into adulthood.

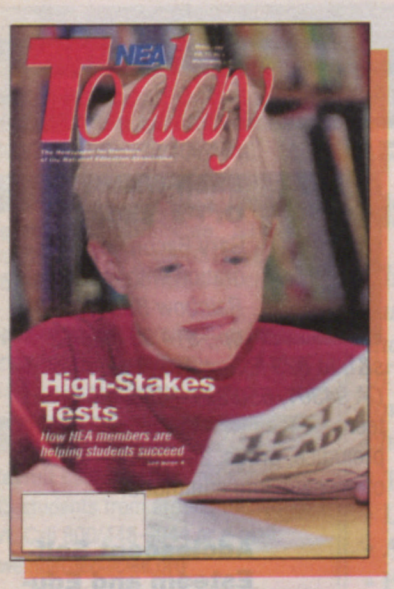
Adolescent Self-Esteem and Educational Practice
Keith B. Higgins. *The Center for Adolescent Self-Esteem, 106 pp., $10.95 plus $1.50 s&h to 58 Country Club Dr., Windsor, CT 06095.* A school psychologist addresses self-esteem within the context of real-life school and classroom situations.

The Battle of Antietam
James P. Reger. *Lucent Books, Inc., 94 pp., $24.95 plus $2.50 s&h to P.O. Box 289011, San Diego, CA 92198.* Another in the Battles of the Civil War series for grades 5-12, this book provides maps, strategy, personalities, impact on civilian life and public policy, and more.

Gift Book of Memories
Pamela Walder Furrer. *Grace Publications, 37 pp., $9.99 plus $3 s&h (plus $.50 for each additional book) to 3819 N. Vermillion, Danville, IL 61832.* Detailed instructions for all ages on how to create scrapbooks of personal thoughts and remembrances from friends. Also available, *Create Memory Books The Easy Way,* $7.99.

Dame Cinco Give Me Five: The Party in the Springtime. Jim Ryan. *Brain Dance, Inc., 24 pp., $12 for book/tape set, $16 for book/CD set, plus $2.50 s&h to P.O. Box 681264, San Antonio, TX 78268.* Hispanic songs, games, dances, and a bilingual musical play for grades 1-5. Also available, same price: *Chiquitos*—Hispanic and English songs, games, and dances for pre-K to first grade.

Letters



History 101

The day that we can guarantee that all children who enter our classrooms will come from homes where their parents value them, are involved in the education process, love them, feed them, read to them, teach them right from wrong, and teach them values and respect will be the day that we might consider evaluating teachers by their students' test scores (Debate, March).

Mignonne Cummings
Sumner, Washington

Using student test scores to evaluate teachers gives the misleading impression that somehow the child's present teacher is responsible for the child's current performance on a test—not past education, experience, background, or present situation.

The erroneous assumption: One human being is responsible for this child's score, good or bad. The erroneous conclusion: Reward them or "off with their heads."

Marcelyn Scott
Riverside, California

'Moral Correctness'

A recent letter writer objected to teaching anything about homosexuality in her classroom, saying we should all teach what's "morally correct" (Letters, March). She claims she would, nonetheless, not "mistreat" any student, nor allow any student to be mistreated.

But, by her stance, her refusal to see that moral correctness isn't defined by one's sexual nature, she is indeed mistreating every student. So long as she brings her bias, narrowness, and intolerance into the classroom, she is morally incorrect.

Teachers need to cherish, validate, and teach every individual. That's the moral correctness that belongs in our public schools.

Marilyn Bonomi
Woodbridge, Connecticut

I was surprised and saddened by the willful ignorance of the teacher who wrote about gay and lesbian issues. I'm a high school teacher who is openly gay. My students know and respect me for the person and teacher that I am. I teach Latin, but, by my life and behavior in class, I also teach what it means to be a person of values and integrity.

John Anderson
Stratford, Connecticut

Totally Professional?

While I enjoyed the articles about teachers who have pursued National Board certification and admire their achievements, I'm dismayed that NEA has chosen to push certification on its members (Cover Story, February).

I've been teaching for 25 years. I have a bachelor's degree, a master's, a California elementary credential, a California special education credential, a resource specialist certificate, and will soon have my cross-cultural language and academic development credential.

If all of these degrees and credentials haven't earned me the respect I'm due as a teacher, adding National Board certification certainly won't. I know I'm a good teacher because, among other things, my students are learning.

Nancy Lynn Barth
Fresno, California

Your article contains one sad quote from a fine teacher who spent hundreds of hours applying for National Board certification: "I said 'bye-bye' to my husband and kids and set up a computer in my dining room."

If the definition of being "totally professional" demands the neglect of one's own family, I, for one, would advocate for something less than total professionalism.

Mike Radach
Oak Harbor, Washington

Reality check: If there are just so many dollars for education, and everyone has national certification, there will be no extra dollars for any teacher. Maybe we should look closer to home to improve teacher quality. The logical starting point: teacher education programs.

Leighton Kaloupek
McPherson, Kansas

Phonics Game

Two thumbs down for your negative view on the Phonics Game (Heroes & Zeroes, February). The Phonics Game is one of the most effective, all-inclusive games I've ever seen. I use the game when I teach reading, and I've seen many of my students' reading abilities enhanced within three to five hours of playing it.

Laurie Nielsen
Murrieta, California

It's a sad irony that *NEA Today* has found a new enemy of public education. The Phonics Game threat must be stopped! We can't just sit by and let untrained parents with a curriculum that bypasses the traditional educational establishment teach students to read. And, to make things worse, kids are having fun doing it.

As teachers, my wife and I can genuinely attest that the Phonics Game does live up to its "dubious" reputation of helping kids increase their reading levels. Sure, we don't totally agree with its marketing approach, but we have seen the "miracle" firsthand.

Mark Putnam
Bothell, Washington

Editor's note: To judge the Phonics Game and its advertising claims for yourself, check the Web sites of the game's producers, www. phonicsgame. com, and the game's critics, www. edresearch.com.

Who's Liable?

I read your article, "Student Suicide: Who's Liable?" with more than passing interest (Rights Watch, February). I'm the mother of a teenage daughter who committed suicide. Arlyn (age 18) shot herself in the head on August 7, 1986.

I'm also a fifth grade teacher who has experienced the paranoia that results, in the minds of teachers and administrators, when the word "suicide" comes up in class, regardless of the context.

My daughter's death was reported with a large headline on the front page of our local newspaper. Because most of my students knew of Arlyn's death, they asked me questions. I tried to answer them honestly, based on what I knew.

Several students told me that talking to me helped them immensely because I stressed the need for them to talk to their parents or others about their feelings, to express their emotions, and to let someone know if they had suicidal thoughts.

Nevertheless, several parents complained to the administration, and I was reprimanded. I was also forbidden to discuss my daughter's suicide ever again.

After reading your article, I understand a little better why the principal of my school worried. After all, lawsuits complicate the educational process, even if they are based on ignorance.

But the losers are the children and their parents. Some of these precious, fragile children may already be harboring suicidal thoughts. Some of them will complete the suicide act.

Meanwhile, the educational process is almost crippled by the constant fear of lawsuits, and our children are not being taught lessons that may save their lives.

Karyl Chastain Beal
Pavo, Georgia

Prison Parallels

The letter comparing schools and prisons was great (Letter from Tucson, Arizona, February). One big difference: Prisoners get time off for good behavior, but students get time off for bad behavior.

Ken Bourn
Bel Air, Maryland

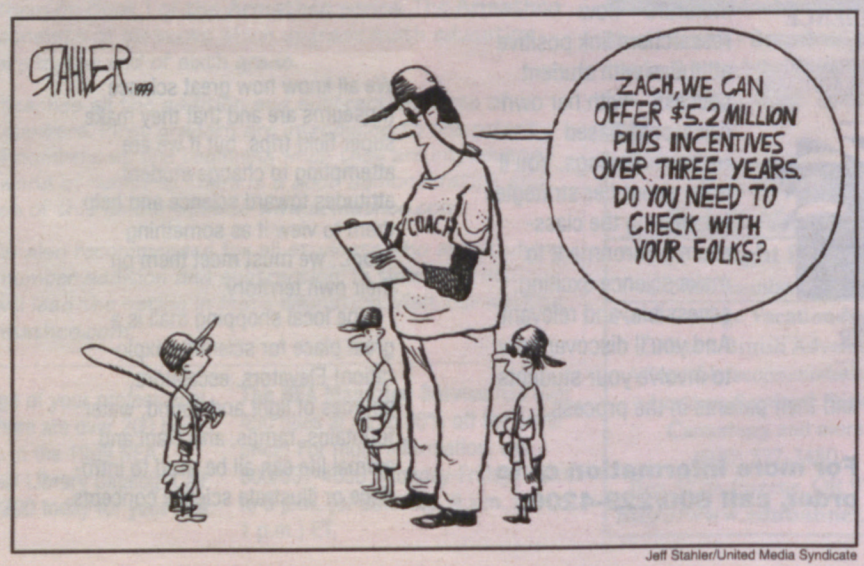
Riding High

If animal abuse were truly "inherent in rodeo events," as a recent letter writer claims (Letter, February), then the ASPCA would be able to stop the sport. The truth is that top dollar is paid for good rodeo stock, and the animals are extremely well cared for.

I applaud not only the Nebraska bull dogger (People, January), but also every teacher with a passion, an expertise, and a life outside the classroom.

Ellie Deuter
Montrose, Colorado

As a teacher and a competing member in the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, I can attest that livestock at rodeos sanctioned by the PRCA are well treated. Sixty rules and



Jeff Stahler/United Media Syndicate

regulations are in place to provide the highest standards in the business for the care of the animals, including the requirement that a veterinarian be present at all events.

Those who are still concerned should contact PRCA Animal Welfare, 101 Pro Rodeo Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80919. The PRCA will supply each teacher with materials that explain the events, equipment, and proud history of the rodeo.

Jay Billingsley
Kinsey, Montana

Social Security

Your outstanding and informative article about Social Security (Newsmakers, February) sheds light in all the right directions. I recommend a copy be sent to President Clinton and appropriate members of the Senate and the Congress as soon as possible, while the discussion of Social Security is on the front burner.

Mary Dion
Warren, Michigan

'Cheap Shot'

I was really disappointed that *NEA Today*, in its report on Read Across America events (Newsmakers, February), found it necessary to trivialize the Mideast conflict by taking a cheap shot at Saddam Hussein.

I'm no fan of Hussein, but I do find it ironic that even while he was reported to be killing some of his own people, the Kurds, he was considered by the United States to be an ally. It was only when he started to act independently of the U.S. that he became a "Hitler" in U.S. eyes.

It's time we wake up to the fact that our country has become the world's biggest bully. *NEA Today* should stop repeating the propaganda being continuously foisted on us by our government and the oh-so-obedient mainstream media.

Esther Mohler Ho
Haywood, California

'Simple Logic'

Praise to Ramnath Subramanian's article, "Stifle the Mantra for Change," (My Turn, February) for its simple logic and powerful conclusions.

Effective teaching and learning have been all but snuffed out beneath the professional literature, materials, strategies, and board policies that accompany each whimsical shift in theory.

As an idealistic first-year high school teacher, I feel like I'm—as Subramanian says—"playing hopscotch" to see that each mandated methodology gets its due in my ever-dwindling hour each day with students.

Unfortunately, unlike hopscotch, the field of education doesn't progress one or two blocks at a time, leaving an old paradigm behind as it goes. It's more like a game of jacks, where one has to keep picking up pieces without putting any down. The problem with either metaphor is that no one can hold all the jacks at once, and there seems to be no final square in the game of hopscotch.

Like most problems, this one is probably best solved with the simplest answer. Like Subramanian says, "stifle the mantra for change" and "trust teachers to get the job done." Sound advice.

Keri Dunbar
Annapolis, Maryland

If Not Now . . .

When will we stop saying that we can't do and make everything we have work for all our kids? It seems to me if President Clinton is really serious about making education his legacy, cashing in one B-2 bomber would provide all children and teachers the technology they need for the 21st century. When are we going to put our children first?

Damon Moore
Richmond, Indiana

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Bob Rubinstein
Eugene, Oregon

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- Through the Web: Go to www.nea.org/neatoday and click on "Submit a Letter to the Editor"
- By E-mail: Write to neatoday@nea.org
- By Fax: 202/822-7206
- By Phone: 202/822-7201

Letters are edited for length and clarity.

A Letter from: Bolivia

Watch Your Hands

By Tom Albert

It became all too real for me while floating down the muddy Manupori River in a 25-foot plank boat. Our outboard motor had stalled, and my boat mates and I were holding onto tree trunks to keep our craft stationary while the mechanic attempted to fix it.

"First time in the rain forest?" my companion asked casually.

I nodded yes.

"Well, maybe next time you should be a little more careful where you put your hands," he advised.

I looked down. Next to my hand was the largest, most ferocious-looking spider I had ever seen. I then realized that the Bolivian rain forest had its own rules.

Though beautiful and exotic, it also was unforgiving. Its impenetrable carpet of green vegetation and searing heat and humidity offered the perfect habitat for foot-wide Anaconda snakes, crocodiles, wasps, blood-sucking mosquitoes and, of course, spiders.

Stupid mistakes like mine could result in tragic consequences. It was a mistake I wouldn't repeat.

Too much was at stake. The NASA scientists I was traveling with had a job to do during their two-week reconnaissance mission.

Led by native Aroana Indians who had never before seen a laptop computer, let alone a satellite dish, the scientists were there to find out if a circular, five-mile-wide feature first discovered by Landsat remote sensing satellite imagery in 1985 was actually a meteor impact crater.

For me, the trip to the "Iturralde Structure" was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

I'm a middle school science teacher on leave from the classroom to work as an "ambassador teacher" at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. My job: to develop new ways to teach earth and environmental science.

So you can imagine my excitement when a scientist asked me to join the Bolivian expedition.

While the scientists worked in the field, I was supposed to conduct 30-minute online educational sessions with students from 18 selected schools in Maryland.

As Murphy's Law would have it, the mission wasn't entirely successful, despite our exhaustive pre-mission testing. We established an audio link on the third day, but satellite difficulties prevented all subsequent communications with our students.

The scientists encountered their own difficulties. They were able to gather soil samples and discover a few species of birds, but they ended up visiting the structure only briefly. It took them six hours to hike to the site. By the time they arrived, it was nearly dark. A rain forest path, needless to say, is no place to spend the night.

Yet science marches forward—in itself an important lesson I certainly will teach my students when I return to the classroom.

Understanding meteors remains an important scientific objective for Goddard scientists, who are planning a return trip this summer. If they prove Iturralde is an impact crater, the discovery could hold clues about the formation of the planets and their moons. It might even help determine whether our own moon formed after a Mars-sized object collided with earth.

Over the years, I've heard it all from my students. Promising boys and girls say they don't want careers in science because they believe scientists are "geeks" and computer nerds.

Think again.

I'll tell them that the folks I traveled with put Indiana Jones to shame. I'll tell them, hey, science isn't what you think it is. Sometimes you have to roll up your sleeves and just do it. And whatever you do, I'll tell them, watch where you put your hands.

That's a lesson I'll never forget.

NEA member Tom Albert is on special assignment to the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. As an ambassador teacher, he develops interactive lessons for earth science instruction. The lessons he developed for the Bolivian expedition can be found on the Web at http://education.gsfc.nasa.gov/experimental/all98invProject.Site/invtitles.html.

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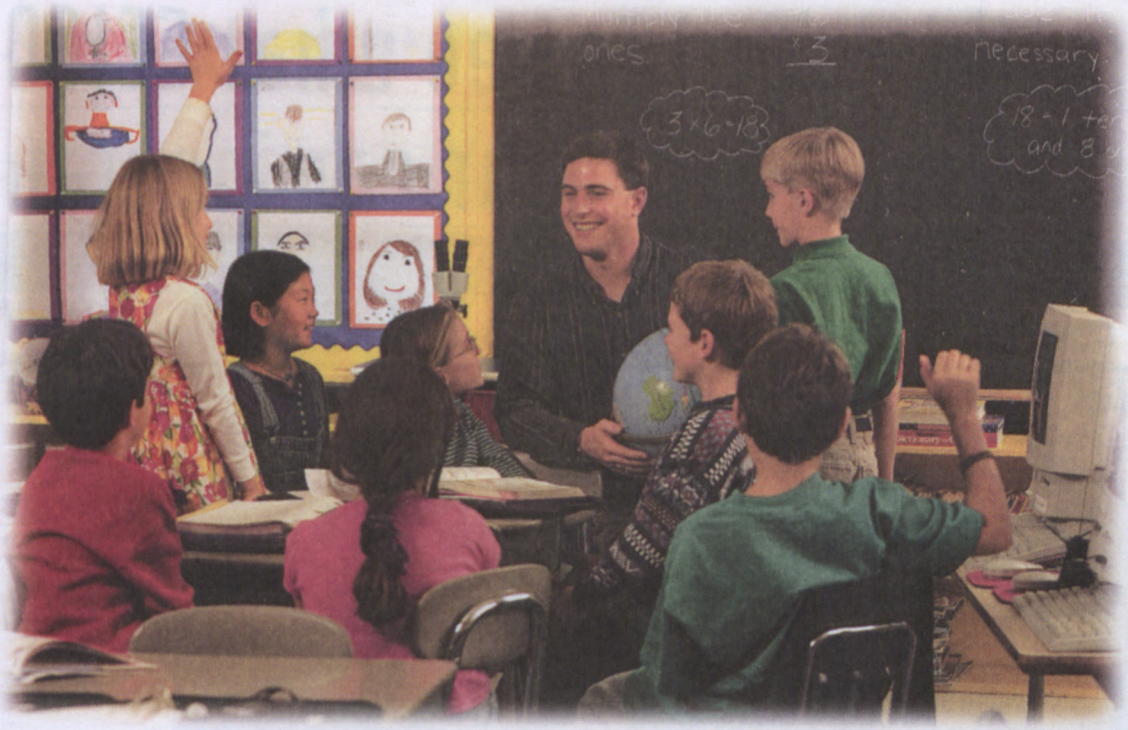

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